Problems of the

NEW TESTAMENT

TO-DAY

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NEW TESTAMENT

TO-DAY

by

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Vicar of Headingley

Examining Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of Norwich

'*Strive for the truth unto death and the Lord God shall fight for thee.*'—Ecclesiasticus iv. 28.

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PREFACE

THE Christian religion takes its stand upon the ground of history. It is not primarily either a system of philosophy or an ethical code. It is what it is because it maintains that certain things have actually happened in the past.

The documents from which our knowledge of these events is in the first instance derived must therefore be of unique and permanent importance in all Christian eyes. For more than three hundred years the Church of England has laid particular emphasis upon the study of the Scriptures, because it is convinced that whenever the Bible is neglected religion will always decay.

But there is now a feeling abroad that the authority of the New Testament has been seriously shaken by recent studies, if it is not in danger of being destroyed outright. On the surface there are some grounds for such misgivings. But it would be more accurate to say that our conception of the nature of the authority which attaches to the New Testament, and of the way in which we ought to invoke it, has undergone a change than that the authority itself has been impaired.

Critical study of the New Testament is to be welcomed, inasmuch as it is one avenue of approach towards that knowledge of the truth for which the Church of England prays twice every day. To fear its conclusions is to stand convicted of lack of Faith. Faith and Courage are very closely allied: and Christian Faith constrains us to recognize that every addition to our knowledge must strengthen the claim upon our loyalty of Him who is Himself the Truth. No false opinion which can be entertained about Him can exalt His character. No mist of piety through which we can view Him can make Him appear greater than He really is.

Per contra. The student who forgets the reverence due to what is sacred, or who treats his own personal grasp as if it were the only standard and test of truth, has deliberately blinded his own eyes. There are still many points, of varying degrees of importance, with regard to which students of the New Testament are not yet entirely agreed. But we are now in a position to say that the net result of recent studies has been to divert our attention from details to broad general outlines. The New Testament can no longer be treated as an armoury from which texts can be selected at will for controversial purposes. We have to read it as a whole, and to try to grasp and apply the principles which it conveys in its entirety. This is a matter of some difficulty. But the effort which it demands is worth making.

The following pages are an attempt to present the New Testament from this general standpoint. I have taken the books which it contains one by one, calling attention to what I believe to be the order in which they were originally written. I have tried to explain the particular circumstances which gave them birth, as without some knowledge of their setting much of their meaning is obscure. I have tried to sum up the salient points of their teaching, and to put into words the general impression which I think they must leave upon the mind of the reader.

I do not think that there is much room for doubt as to the main lineaments of the Figure which they portray—in part deliberately, in part half-unconsciously. I do not think that we can go behind the pages of the New Testament and reconstruct any portrait of the Figure which dominates them, more truthful than the one with which they obviously present us.

The Portrait is amazing—almost beyond belief. But it has been drawn, and cannot be explained away. The present course and future destiny of every human soul depend upon the attitude which we choose to adopt towards it.

My first object in writing has been to try to make it a little easier for those who are not professed scholars to gather from the Bible what it has to give them. What follows is therefore a further instalment of an attempt which I made three years

ago in *The Old Testament : Its Meaning and Value for the Church To-day.*

If I have allowed myself to entertain any more ambitious project it has been a hope that anything which may help to promote a better understanding of the Christian Scriptures may contribute something towards that restoration of godly union and concord amongst all Christian people for which we pray.

A bibliography would have to be either overwhelmingly long, or scandalously incomplete. I have therefore confined myself to enumerating the books to which specific reference is made in the footnotes.

I am deeply indebted to my wife for the skill and patience with which she has prepared my somewhat intricate MS. for the press, and for her work in correcting the proofs and compiling the index.

I must also express my profound gratitude to the Bishop of Ripon for the trouble which he has taken in reading the proofs, and for the many valuable suggestions which he has made.

R. H. M.

HEADINGLEY,
All Saints, 1922.

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I

INTRODUCTORY

The Reformation of the Church of England which was accomplished during the sixteenth century was the outcome of a variety of causes, and was shaped by a number of different forces. It is almost impossible that any movement upon a scale so large should be inspired by a single motive, or that all the motives behind it should be of the highest character.

But with the political and economic aspects of the Reformation we are not now concerned. It is primarily as a religious movement that the Reformation presents itself to us to-day, and that we feel the effects of it. And in as far as it was a religious movement it may be described as A revolt of the individual conscience against the authority of the Church.

It would be difficult to point to any reforming movement in any sphere, which, however pure and lofty the original motive, does not exhibit some regrettable features. And it is to be expected that these will vary directly as the antiquity and extent of the original abuse.

We cannot bestow unmixed praise upon all the changes which were introduced into the religious life of England between the passing of the first Act of Supremacy in 1534 and the publication of the Lambeth Articles in 1595. Still less can we defend all the measures by which the triumph of the new régime was secured.

But the Reformation was not, as some Roman Catholic writers are fond of asserting, a repudiation of all moral restraint. It was not even a repudiation of the principle of authority in matters of religion : the Preface to the Book of Common Prayer alone is sufficient to establish that. It was a revolt of conscience against the authority of the Church, as that authority was being exercised at the time.

The Mediaeval Church was a very splendid institution and possessed many strong claims upon the respect and confidence

of the Christian world. It was the only thing which had survived the chaos into which western Europe had fallen after the collapse of the western Roman Empire in the fifth century; and something of the glamour of Imperial Rome still hung about it. It had mothered the new nations which had arisen amid the ruins of the Empire. It had prevented the complete extinction of the light of civilization during the ninth and tenth centuries. For many centuries it provided the only field for the exercise of the tastes and talents which now find their scope in various peaceful professions. Artists and architects, musicians, literary men, lawyers, and many more were all 'Churchmen',[1] and most of the great offices of State in the kingdoms of western Europe were filled by ecclesiastics, because there was no one else of sufficient knowledge or education to do the work. And while this was not to the best interest of religion it naturally enhanced the prestige of the Church *quâ* institution.

Moreover its frequent holy-days were the only breaks in the monotonous round of almost unbearable drudgery in which the poorer classes passed their lives. The lot of a mediaeval labourer was a very hard one, and the Church was the only source from which he could hope for any alleviation of it. The Church's rigid insistence on the observance of its holy-days was a real act of justice to the poor.

But as time went on certain flaws in this imposing structure became apparent.

1. The Church tried to dominate the whole of human life from the cradle to the grave, to an extent which was impossible of success, but succeeded in becoming intolerable.

In The Canon Law it possessed what had come into being as a body of advice,[2] based upon long and wide experience relating to every contingency which could possibly arise. Regarded as advice it could perhaps hardly have been bettered. But when this body of advice was converted into a Code of Law, and administered as such, the results, which were very far reaching, were not very fortunate. The Code was too minute to be enforced

[1] i.e. either inmates of monasteries or in some degree of Holy Orders. In mediaeval language a 'Churchman' did not mean merely a lay member of the Church, but an ecclesiastical person.

[2] cf. Creighton, *The Church and the Nation*, p. 191.

as a whole without respect of persons, and therefore innumerable exceptions to its provisions had to be allowed. These exceptions were necessarily multiplied until they rivalled, if they did not actually exceed, the number of the original provisions, and the result was almost inconceivable confusion.

A loyal son of the Church found that the Church insisted on the right to regulate his entire life down to the smallest details. But to almost every positive injunction which it might give him an exception might be quoted of which the sanction was indisputable. Accordingly the more earnestly he desired to respect the Church's authority, and to live by its laws, the more difficult it became for him to ascertain in any given case either what those laws were or how the authority from which they proceeded expected him to interpret them.

2. In more than one respect the practice of the Church had disastrously outrun its theory: [1] largely no doubt because many of the clergy were men of very little education. Many of the practices which evoked the contemptuous wrath of the Protestant Reformers were at least harmless in origin, and could be made edifying provided that they were rightly understood. But the necessary explanation was often complicated and was therefore not given, or not effective. A competent theologian might be able to justify in theory something which was in practice obviously detrimental to spiritual life, because the interpretation commonly put upon it was very far from what had originally been intended.[2]

3. At the beginning of the thirteenth century the Papacy had reached the zenith of its power and prestige. The story of its rise is a long and chequered one, but the pre-eminent position enjoyed by Innocent III (1198–1216) was upon the whole well-deserved. It was the outcome of the ability, integrity, courage, and energy which (with certain lapses) had marked the long line of his predecessors.

Innocent III stood forth as the unquestioned arbiter of Europe

[1] e.g. especially in the matter of Indulgences.

[2] This is largely the case in the Roman Catholic Church to-day, and is deplored by the authorities who find themselves unable to remedy it. Cf. Article XXXI. *Of the One Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross.*

in virtue of his spiritual office. But his triumph gave a powerful impetus to the development of the Papacy as an Italian State. His successors became more and more Italian Princes, and consequently less and less well-fitted to exercise the office of Universal Bishop. They became immersed in politics, and the exigencies of their own Principality became the determining factor in their policy.

From the point of view of a foreigner there came to be little difference in practice between the Pope of Rome and (say) the Doge of Venice. But the Papacy continued to make claims for itself incompatible with the position which it had come to occupy.

It was the mouthpiece of the Church, and as such unquestionable authority must attach to all its utterances touching matters of religion. It claimed the right to be regarded as the final Court of Appeal in all matters. But in practice every one knew that its decisions were influenced by motives which were not the highest. The elected Chief of an Italian Principality was commonly in dire need of money, and it therefore became only too obvious that the scales of Papal justice were not balanced by an impartial hand.

The system of the Mediaeval Church became virtually unintelligible to the ordinary man, and it could only be interpreted by an authority whose decisions no longer commanded respect. Personal religion was well-nigh smothered under the chaotic accumulations of centuries. Attempts to reform it from within were made during the fifteenth century, but they came to nothing. Eventually private conscience could stand it no longer, and broke into open revolt, first in Germany and then in England. The authority of the Church, as it was being exercised, and as it had been exercised for centuries, seemed to be incapable of reform. The only course remaining was therefore to set it aside, and to endeavour to build a religious system which would not be a standing outrage upon conscience upon some other foundation.

Authority is as necessary in religion as in any other sphere. Without it the accumulated experience of the past will run to waste. And men are especially prone to desire it in matters of religion. The issues involved are more momentous than any others because they are not confined to this life, and therefore

the majority of people naturally desire to reduce the margin of uncertainty to the narrowest possible limits. They wish to know authoritatively what they ought to believe and do, and the most formidable temptation to which religious teachers are exposed is to yield to pressure and to be more positive and definite in their teaching than is consistent with a scrupulous regard for Truth.

Accordingly as soon as the Reformers had rejected the authority of the Papacy it was necessary for them to find some substitute for it. Otherwise their hopes of purifying their own part of the Church were bound to prove abortive. The first outcome of a religious system which did not avowedly rest upon authority of some kind would be anarchy, which would be followed by a strong reaction in favour of the authority which had been discarded. Unless some effective substitute for the Papacy could be found the Reformation was bound to fail.

In England (as in Sweden) great pains were taken to maintain the ancient structure of the Church and to preserve the continuity of its life. The holders of ecclesiastical offices were retained in their positions as far as possible, and the structure of the Book of Common Prayer and of the Ordinal shows that the aim throughout was not to found a new religious society (as was done in more than one place on the continent) but to regulate and purify an old one.

But the authority of the Reformed Church could not be regarded as its own adequate justification. In the first place it was of too local a character. England had barely joined the ranks of the Great Powers, and the Church of England was not in a position to defy *per se* the public opinion of Europe. And secondly when the question was raised as it was bound to be by all the most devout and earnest minds—By what right can a particular Church reject the ancient, apostolic, and universal authority of Rome?—it could not be enough to reply By its own inherent authority.

If any reformed Church were to stand against Rome it was bound to equip itself with an external buttress of some kind.

There were only two ways in which this buttress might be provided. One was by appealing to the authority of the State:

the other by appealing to the authority of the Bible. The German and Swiss reformers inclined to the former, and created new State-Churches whose existence was held to be sufficiently justified by the sanction and support of the Civil Power supreme in the locality in which they were situated. England was guided to the better choice. Here the State was content to play a less obtrusive part. It exerted itself to secure the uniformity of worship and discipline at which the Church was aiming, and to ensure that ecclesiastical regulations should not be flouted on the pretext that they were illegal. The Reformation in England resulted in a very considerable emancipation of the Church from State interference. This emancipation did not perhaps proceed as far as was theoretically desirable. But the gain was very real.[1]

With the good-will of the State behind it the Church of England flung itself upon the authority of the Bible. It took the Bible as the supreme guide in all questions of Faith and Morals, with the corollary, at first tacit rather than explicit, that the conscience and understanding of the individual reader are the only guide needed to interpret it aright and to apply it to all the varying needs of life.

This policy could not have been adopted at an earlier period. But by the middle of the sixteenth century the invention of printing, coupled with the appearance of English translations[2] which were a great improvement on any previous versions, had made the Bible much more accessible to the ordinary man than it had ever been before. And the process of popularizing the Bible (if we may so describe it) was still further promoted shortly after the beginning of the seventeenth century by the appearance of that unrivalled masterpiece of English prose, the Authorized Version.[3] For more than three centuries England has been fortunate enough to possess a translation of the Bible which is also an English classic.

[1] e. g. The secularization of the revenues of the Church by using them to provide salaries for the officials which the State needed for its own service came to an end for good and all. During the fifteenth century this had been carried to a flagrant pitch. cf. Creighton, *The Italian Bishops of Worcester*. (*Historical Essays and Reviews*, p. 202.)

[2] Tyndale's in 1533. Coverdale's in 1535. The Great Bible 1540.

[3] 1611.

Since first it reasserted its rightful independence the Church of England has urged the study of the Scriptures upon all its sons and daughters, with a very large measure of success. The Bible has been, and still is, more widely read in Great Britain [1] than anywhere else in the world. Nowhere else has it entered so deeply into the life of the people. And this has brought many solid advantages in its train. It has given to our religion a sober virility which the more fervent piety of other communions often seems to us to lack. It has contributed more than anything else to the maintenance of a high standard of conscience in public as well as in private life. And it has promoted the revival of personal religion which it was the principal object of the Reformers to secure.

This revival may sometimes seem to have been disappointingly slow, and its course has not been unchequered. But that there has been real progress is attested by the following facts.

The Book of Common Prayer directs that ' every Parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year, of which Easter to be one '. That was as high as the Reformers dared to fix the standard, and if it had been reached it would have represented a great advance on current practice. Communion on the part of the laity had been ousted by the practice of ' hearing Mass '. When that was abolished it meant that at ordinary parish churches Celebrations of the Holy Communion were perforce, for lack of communicants, few and far between. The whole tenor of the rubrics attached to the Communion Office implies that a Celebration is a comparatively rare occurrence. It was necessary to educate the people to communicating, and the process had to be begun from the very bottom.

In 1689 a Royal Commission was appointed for the Revision of the Liturgy, and it was proposed to add the following new rubric to the Communion Office—' And in every Great Town or Parish there shall be a Communion once a Month And in every Parish at least four times in the Year, that is on Christmas-day, Easter-day, Whitsunday, and some Lord's day soon after Harvest at the Minister's discretion '.

[1] The Established Church of Scotland has, I believe, maintained the same policy with similar results.

The projected new Prayer Book never came into use,[1] but the fact that such a rubric could be drafted shows that personal religion had revived considerably since the reign of Queen Elizabeth. And few, if any, people would be content with the standard of 1689 to-day.

But if the Church of England has done well in consistently urging all its sons and daughters to read the Bible for themselves, and if this policy has been amply justified by the steady revival of personal religion which has accompanied it, there are facts upon the other side too weighty to be ignored.

When the Reformers made their appeal to Scripture, and flung themselves upon its authority, they were adopting the best course open to them. But they did not see to what lengths their principle might be carried.

It is not possible to exaggerate the authority of the Bible, provided that the nature of that authority be rightly understood. But it is easy in exalting the authority of the Bible to become guilty of two errors of a very serious kind.

1. We may ignore the parallel authority which attaches to the Church as ' the Witness and Keeper of Holy Writ '.[2]

2. We may in our desire to find support for our own wishes or opinions treat the Bible, especially the New Testament, as if it were a Collection of Precedents—and so fail to recognize that it is in reality a *corpus* of Principles.

Both these mistakes have been, and still are being, made, and the religious life of the nation has been injuriously affected by them.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the idea that the Bible is the only legitimate authority in matters of religion became widely prevalent and was embodied in such sayings as—*The Bible and the Bible only is the Religion of Protestants.*[3] And this principle was pushed so far that by the beginning of the nineteenth century the idea that the Church possessed, or could possess, any spiritual authority of its own

[1] The proposed alterations were printed by order of the House of Commons in 1854, and can be had of Messrs. Eyre & Spottiswoode. The original volume is in the library of Lambeth Palace.

[2] Article XX. *Of the Church.*

[3] Coined by William Chillingworth (1602–44).

was virtually extinct. Any authority which it might claim or exercise was held to be derived entirely from Parliament, and was therefore identical with that which attached to any other branch of the Public Service.

The extent to which this idea had become an axiom is illustrated by the sensation produced by a sermon entitled *Hear the Church* which was preached at the Chapel Royal before Queen Victoria in June 1838 by Dr. Hook.[1] The preacher spoke of the Church not as a mere 'National Establishment' but as a religious community, intrinsically independent of the State, basing its claim to allegiance on its own character and not upon the enactments of the Civil Power. Twenty-eight editions of the sermon were printed, and about a hundred thousand copies were sold.[2]

The Oxford Movement did much to diffuse a truer conception, but its effectiveness was somewhat marred by the stress which it laid upon antiquarian detail. And at the present day there are a very large number of pious people to whom such a phrase as *the sin of schism* means nothing. Many people—probably in fact a clear majority throughout the country—would be genuinely surprised if it were suggested to them that there is any real reason why any one who feels dissatisfied with the Church of England in any particular (or even with the conduct of any individual clergyman) should not immediately quit it and institute a new religious society of his own.

The Roman Catholic is entitled to point the finger of scorn at the variety of distinct religious bodies (whose number would probably be very largely increased if North America were included) whose existence in the United Kingdom is acknowledged by *Whitaker's Almanac.*

And he may fairly urge that the only parallel in Nature to the fissiparous tendencies of Protestantism is to be found in certain insects inhabiting our ponds. These too propagate their species by a process of indefinite subdivision. But they do not rank high in the scale of created life.

And there is no single sect which does not justify itself by

[1] Vicar of Leeds 1837–59, Dean of Chichester 1859–75.
[2] *Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook*, vol. i, p. 425.

appealing to the text of the Bible. Each one stands upon an interpretation of certain passages irrefragable in its own eyes, however preposterous in those of everybody else.

Every one to-day deplores the divisions of Christendom. We realize that they are contrary to the mind of Christ, and we are all anxious to heal them.

But we cannot deny that in England they are largely due to the practice of appealing to the Bible without reference to the authority of the Church. They are rooted in the conviction that the text of the Bible as interpreted by the individual reader is a sufficient guide in all matters appertaining to religion.

The Reformation succeeded in reviving personal religion, for which we cannot thank God too much. But this has been accomplished at the cost of sacrificing, even within the borders of our own country, the corporate witness of the One, United, Christian Society. The price was not inevitable. But it has in fact been paid.

Moreover the desire for some simple and explicit authority has led to a use of the New Testament which was never intended by its authors, or by the Founder of Christianity.

We have tended to treat it as if it were a Code of Law. Faithfulness to our Lord has often been understood to mean clinging to particular phrases, rather than courageous application of the eternal principles which He manifested and proclaimed to new and continually changing conditions.

Attempts are sometimes made, in defiance of His own refusal to act the part of *Judge* or *Divider*,[1] to show that He foresaw and provided for the extraordinarily complicated conditions of modern civilization, so that the Gospel can be used as if it were a Text Book of Economics. The apostolic writings have been explored as if they were a formal treatise on Church Order, and efforts have been made, from varying points of view, to deduce from them what ought to be the one and only constitution of the Church of Christ. All these have been unsuccessful. The conclusions which have been drawn whether for or against episcopacy have satisfied those who drew them, but have not convinced those whom they were intended to persuade.

[1] *S. Luke* 12[14].

Three centuries of direct, universal appeal to the Bible, and of private interpretation of its contents, have enabled us to discern the strength and weakness of the principle. On the one hand we cannot desire that the Bible should be less read. If it were to become comparatively unknown that would be a religious catastrophe of the first magnitude. But on the other hand we must desire that our reading of it should be as fruitful as possible of good: that it should serve to correct rather than to stereotype the prejudices and preconceptions which we bring to it, that it should give us a deeper understanding of the true mind of Christ, and so make us more loyal in our allegiance to Him.

We do not want to read the New Testament any less. But we do want to read it in rather a different way. We want to heighten the personal religion of which it is the principal source and inspiration without being captured by the spiritual waywardness and obstinacy which have led to the innumerable divisions of the Christian world and have paralysed its power of corporate witness.

The difficulty of reading the New Testament aright has always been considerable. But of late years it has been enhanced by what is known as *Higher Criticism*. For more than a century scholars in many countries have been subjecting the documents which compose the New Testament to the most rigorous scrutiny. No other writings in the world have ever been so carefully examined; and no Christian can hold that the time and energy which have been expended in this way have been excessive. If the New Testament is what the Church believes it to be: that is to say if it presents us in the Gospels with the only record we can ever possess of the Revelation of the Son of God, and if the other books which it contains reflect the spiritual experiences of some of those who knew and loved Him best, and throw a unique light upon the earliest and most creative period in the history of the Church to which we belong, it must be entitled to the most careful study which men can bestow upon it. Any addition to our knowledge about it must serve to increase its claim upon our conscience, and its value as a guide.

It is natural that all the scholars who have applied themselves to the study of the New Testament are not in complete agreement

as to the result of their researches. But speaking roughly it may be said that the Christian Canon has stood the very searching test to which it has been submitted. As a whole its genuineness has not been shaken, and its unique value is unimpaired.

But we have discovered that certain traditional views about it cannot be maintained, and that certain others rest upon foundations so slight that they can only be accepted with reservations.

For example: Careful study has revealed the fact that the first three Gospels cannot be counted independent witnesses to the story which they narrate. S. Matthew and S. Luke have in places copied S. Mark. In other places they have copied a document which we do not now possess, which it has become customary to refer to as Q (=*Quelle*, source).

S. Matthew's Gospel nowhere professes to be the work of an eyewitness, and its structure and arrangement suggest strongly that it was not.[1]

The author of the fourth Gospel was named *John*: but it is doubtful whether he were the son of Zebedee. He is obviously identical with the author of the *First Epistle of S. John*, but it is not so certain that he also wrote the Second and Third. Nor can we decide to what *John* we ought to ascribe the *Revelation*.[2]

We cannot tell who wrote the epistle *To the Hebrews*, and it is unlikely that the *Second Epistle of S. Peter*, and the *Epistle of S. Jude*, are by the Apostles whose names they bear. It has also been doubted whether the epistles *To Timothy* and *To Titus* are by the hand of S. Paul.

Questions of authorship such as these are of secondary importance only. But minute study of the Gospels has raised problems of a more serious nature. For it has become clear to us that the story which we have received owes something to the human agents through whom it has been transmitted. Exactly how much it owes it is impossible for us to say. But that it owes something there can be no doubt. Our grounds for asserting this are simple and obvious.

[1] e.g. throughout the earlier part of the Gospel the chronology is extremely vague. And our Lord's sayings seemed to be grouped according to their content, without reference to the occasions on which they were uttered.

[2] The difficulty of ascribing it to the author of the Gospel had been felt by Dionysius of Alexandria in the third century.

1. The impression which any speaker leaves upon the mind of any audience is affected by the prepossessions of his hearers. Whether they are conscious of it or not, their interpretation and recollection of what they have heard will be modified to some extent by their own preconceived ideas.

The only circumstances under which this would not arise would be if the subject were one to which no member of the audience had previously given a moment's thought. And in that case it is probable that the greater part of the speaker's discourse would prove too unintelligible to be remembered.

Now we believe that the Incarnation was the crown of a long period of preparation. For many centuries God had been training His chosen people up to the point at which they would be able to receive the revelation of His Son.[1] That is, in brief, the meaning and value of the Old Testament. It is the record of God's education of Israel for the Incarnation of His Son. Read from this standpoint it is a record of unique spiritual value. Regarded from any other much of its importance evaporates.

Our Lord accepted this view. He declared that the Scriptures pointed to Himself: that He was the Figure of whom the Prophets had spoken and that His Ministry was the point on which the previous history of His nation converged.[2]

Therefore He did not address His hearers in a new language. When He accepted the title *Christ*[3] (which means *The Anointed One*) He identified Himself with the figure upon whom the hope of Israel had been focussed for centuries. And whenever He spoke of His *Kingdom* He was using a phrase with which all who heard Him were thoroughly familiar; to which they attached very definite ideas.

It is true that His conduct and teaching did not conform to what was expected of the part which He declared to be His own.

[1] The preparation of the world for Christ is not, as more than one early Christian writer saw, confined to the history of Israel. But the form which it took amongst other nations lies outside the scope of these pages.

[2] e.g. *S. Mark* 1^{15}. *S. Luke* 4^{21}.

[3] *S. Matt.* $16^{16, 17}$ *Christ* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Other titles of Messiah were *The Beloved* (cf. *S. Mark* 1^{11}) and *The Coming One* (cf. *S. Mark* 11^{9}, *S. Matt.* 11^{3}).

As time went on the discrepancy between what He showed Himself to be, and what was imperiously demanded of the Hope of Israel by tradition became more and more apparent. It alienated some of His followers and perplexed even the most faithful. Even those who remained, who did their best to accept whole-heartedly the wonderful transformation and expansion which their expectations underwent at His hands, could not divest themselves entirely and in a moment of the ideas in which they had been steeped from their cradles.[1]

Now one of the things of which our Lord spoke continually was His *Kingdom*, or the *Kingdom of God*, or the *Kingdom of Heaven*.[2] The establishment of this Kingdom is represented as imminent, and it was to be accomplished by His personal agency. And here, He came into contact with a body of definite traditional belief.

Since the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans in 586 B.C. the Jews had never been an independent nation. But the hope of political freedom never deserted them, and even after our Lord's time inspired three desperate struggles with Rome.[3]

But as time went on the prospect of achieving this by any ordinary means, that is to say by statesmanship or by force of arms, was seen to be exceedingly remote. Therefore the hopes of the Jews became centred more and more in supernatural assistance. It was an axiom that Messiah should establish a politically independent kingdom and that his capital should be Jerusalem. But the only way in which this could be accomplished was by means of what may best be described as a Divine Cataclysm. If the forces of the Gentiles were too strong for the armies of the Chosen People, wielding the weapons of the flesh, it followed that they must be overthrown by Messiah at the head of the Hosts of Heaven.

This idea appears before the close of the Old Testament.[4] It was developed and became extremely popular during the century immediately before the Birth of Christ in writings which, though they have not been included in the Bible, did much to

[1] e.g. *Acts* 11^{18}, where an almost grudging recognition of the Gentiles is forced upon the Jewish Christians by the course of events.

[2] e.g. *S. Mark* 1^{15}, 9^{1}.

[3] A.D. 66–70, A.D. 116–17, A.D. 130–2.

[4] e.g. *Daniel* 7^{10}.

create the general atmosphere in which those who heard our Lord speak had been brought up.[1] The belief that Messiah's Kingdom could only be established by sudden and supernatural violence had come to be regarded as almost indisputable. Our Lord never endorsed this idea. On the contrary He challenged it explicitly and implicitly more than once.[2] But as any reference to His *Kingdom* must immediately have suggested the idea of a Divine Cataclysm to His hearers (and at first could hardly have suggested anything else) it is inevitable that they should have tended to colour His utterances somewhat, in order to bring them into harmony with their own cherished convictions. They would naturally have made the most of anything which He said which could possibly be used to support their own expectations.[3]

Further reference to this point will be made in a subsequent chapter. Here it is enough to say that the wonder is not that this conception of the Kingdom has crept into the Gospel,[4] but that any other conception of it has retained a place there.[5]

2. We know that the Gospel-story in the form in which we possess it now was not committed to writing until at least thirty-five years after the events which it describes. Portions of it were written down before that, but these earlier documents (if there was more than one of them) have disappeared. We only know of their existence from the fact that they have been incorporated in our Gospels, where their presence has been detected by careful study.[6]

For one whole generation the knowledge of what our Lord had said and done was preserved chiefly if not entirely by living memory. It was transmitted from believer to believer by oral

1 e.g. the Psalms of Solomon and the pre-Christian parts of the Book of Enoch.

2 e.g. *S. Matt.* $20^{20\text{-}8}$, *S. Luke* $9^{51\text{-}6}$.

3 As the point is important the following rough parallel may serve as an illustration. To us in England the idea of Empire immediately suggests sea-power. It would be very difficult for us to understand a teacher who put before us the hope of an Empire in which sea-power should play no part. And any metaphorical expressions such as *The Ship of State* which he might use might be construed literally as referring to an actual visible navy, because the sea would seem to us to be the only foundation upon which the promised Empire could rest.

4 e.g. *S. Mark* $13^{24\text{-}37}$. 5 e.g. *S. Matt.* $13^{1\text{-}33}$. 6 See above, p. 26.

tradition. At first sight this may seem to us to betray a failure on the part of the first Christians to appreciate the overwhelming significance of what they had heard and seen. The explanation lies in the belief that the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world were close at hand.

When S. Paul wrote the *First Epistle to the Thessalonians*, which is several years older than any of our Gospels, he expected to be alive when this took place.[1] The first Christians took no steps to provide for the future of the Church because they believed that there would not be any future to need provision. After a generation had passed the foundations of this belief were seen to be insecure, and then, when some of those who had been with Him in the days of His Flesh were dead and the others were growing old, it was found necessary to draw up a trustworthy record of the facts before the last of those who had first-hand knowledge of them had passed away.[2]

Now oral tradition is often remarkably constant and trustworthy. Its value among people who make comparatively little use of reading and writing is probably much higher than it would be amongst ourselves to-day.

It was moreover a particularly prominent element in Jewish religious life. Side by side with the written law was a vast body of traditional interpretation which was never committed to writing but was handed on by word of mouth, from Master to Disciple, from generation to generation. It was a method of teaching to which that world was well accustomed.

But while rating as highly as possible the value of the oral tradition of the primitive Christian community we are bound to recognize that it can hardly have lasted for a generation without being modified in some way by those through whom it passed. These unconscious alterations would be unlikely to affect the main features of the story. It is, however, natural that they should affect some of its details. At the least, that is a possibility which we cannot discard entirely. And in fact it is possible to trace some modifications of S. Mark's original story as it appears in the later versions of S. Matthew and S. Luke. And these modifications are (as we should expect) in the direction of

[1] *1 Thess.* 4^{15-18}.

[2] cf. *S. Luke* 1^{1-4}.

heightening the miraculous or supernatural element. A comparison of S. Mark's account of the Resurrection (16^{1-8}) with S. Matthew's (28^{2-6}) will be a sufficient illustration of the point.

Such alterations are not of any real importance. They do not touch either the general credibility of the narrative, or its permanent value to us. But they do show that the story has 'lost nothing in the telling'. There is an obvious tendency to make it seem (or to tell it in a way which in the narrator's eyes would make it seem) a little more wonderful than it really was. This tendency is exactly what we should expect when we are dealing with a story which was preserved orally for a generation: and in our reading of the Gospel allowance must be made for it.

3. We do not know what language our Lord habitually spoke. But it is probable that He generally if not invariably employed His mother-tongue. This was Aramaic, a language (for it would hardly be fair to dismiss it as a dialect) which bore to the Hebrew of the Old Testament much the same relation as the English of the twentieth century does to the speech of Edward the Confessor.

This would have been our Lord's natural medium of communication with His fellow-countrymen, though it is probable that the majority of them could both speak and understand Greek.[1] And the probability that He normally employed it is heightened by the fact that on three occasions He is represented by the Evangelists as doing so.[2]

But as our Gospels are written in Greek, the records of our Lord's discourses which they contain must be translations.

Now no translation which extends to more than three or four words can be an absolutely accurate reproduction of the original. It must owe something to the translator, and we must therefore recognize that on this ground alone, apart from the two others to which reference has been made above, we cannot say that we possess the *ipsissima verba* of the Son of God. In some instances His sayings may have undergone considerable modification before they have reached us.

That the New Testament writers did not attach as much

[1] But see *Acts* 2^{13}.

[2] *S. Mark* 5^{41}, 7^{34}, 15^{34}. Each of these were occasions on which the actual words which fell from His lips were likely to have imprinted themselves with especial distinctness upon the minds of all who heard them.

importance to absolute verbal accuracy as we are inclined to do is evinced by the following curious fact.

The majority [1] of the numerous quotations from the Old Testament which the New contains are not taken direct from the original Hebrew, but from the Greek version known as the *Septuagint*.[2] The *Septuagint* cannot possibly be regarded as a good translation. In many passages the translators were obviously quite unable to understand the Hebrew before them and contented themselves either with reproducing it in Greek letters, or with what seemed to them to be a probable conjecture as to its meaning.

Yet the New Testament writers chose to make use of this translation. We should naturally have expected them to have had recourse to the original fountain-head, which they had been brought up to regard with the deepest reverence, and to have reproduced its exact sense as carefully as they could.[3]

A further striking indifference to the verbal accuracy which we are accustomed to prize is to be found in the *Epistle to the Ephesians* and will serve for the purpose of illustration. In Chapter 4, verse 8, S. Paul writes—*Wherefore he saith when he ascended on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men,* and a reader who was familiar with the Old Testament would say without hesitation that the words are a quotation from Psalm lxviii verse 18.

But if we refer to the original we shall find that it runs thus :

Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led thy captivity captive ;
Thou hast received gifts among men.

S. Paul has introduced two important alterations into the wording of the verse.

1. He has changed the verbs from the second person to the third.

2. He has altered *received* to *gave.*

These changes add very much to the force and appropriateness of the quotation in the connexion in which the Apostle introduces it. But the first is a departure from the original, and the

[1] If not all.

[2] It was made for the benefit of the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria from about 250 B.C. onwards.

[3] cf. *S. Matt.* 5[18].

second changes the sense of the passage completely: facts of which he must have been well aware.

It is possible that he did not himself originate the alterations, but was guided by an old Jewish interpretation with which he was familiar which paraphrased *gave gifts unto men* instead of *received gifts among men*.[1]

But the point which immediately concerns us is this. Where a paraphrase of Scripture giving a completely different turn to the passage suited S. Paul's purpose better than the original he did not hesitate to make use of it in preference to what he must have known to be the true text. A modern writer would not act thus, and his critics would charge him with carelessness, or dishonesty, if he did. But the fact that S. Paul saw no reason against such free handling of his materials shows that he did not regard verbal exactness with our eyes.

This may seem to some to be startling, and even disconcerting. If the New Testament be not entirely accurate down to the minutest verbal details, what becomes of its title to be called *Inspired*? If the Gospel narrative owes something to the Evangelists themselves, how can we be sure that it is trustworthy, and how can we use it with any confidence? And if the authority of the Gospel can be impugned in any way, have not the very foundations of the Christian Faith been destroyed?

These are all fair questions. They cannot be evaded, but must be faced honestly. The answers which can be made to them may be summarized under the following heads.

1. Nothing in the foregoing pages impugns the general credibility of the Gospel-narrative as a whole.[2] Any uncertainty which we may feel extends only to *minutiae* of phraseology and to the minor details of particular incidents. It does not really matter whether the Resurrection was preceded by an earthquake or not, nor how the stone was rolled away from the sepulchre. The pillars upon which the Christian Faith are carried are larger and stronger than such considerations as these.

[1] cf. *S. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, by J. Armitage Robinson, pp. 179, 180 *n*.

[2] For a further discussion of this question see below Chapter VII.

2. If we assume that *Inspiration* guarantees invariable verbal accuracy we are making an assumption which rests upon no solid foundation.

Unless we profess to be inspired ourselves we can start with no knowledge as to the effect which inspiration is likely to produce on those upon whom it is bestowed. We can only ascertain its nature by careful investigation of the writings which we regard as inspired. The result of such investigation might prove that our theory was correct, or it might not.

In reality the idea that inspiration enables a human being to play the part of a phonograph [1] is intrinsically so improbable that we could only accept it if it were absolutely forced upon us by facts. And it would raise more difficulties than it would remove. If *Inspiration* be anything at all it must be a Divine Gift : and it is difficult, if not downright profane, to hold that the effect of a Divine Gift is to reduce the recipient to the level of a mechanical contrivance. Indeed if that were what *Inspiration* means the phonograph would really rank above the Evangelist, inasmuch as it never requires sleep and can be active for twenty-four hours a day.

It is therefore fortunate that our study of the New Testament does not compel us to form any such conception of Inspiration. On the contrary it confirms the suggestion of our own common-sense that an *Inspired Book* does not mean a work into which no verbal error could by any possibility have crept.

3. The question whether the presence of verbal inaccuracies or error in the Gospels impairs their value for us to-day depends upon the way in which we propose to use them.

If we insist on treating them as a collection of precedents, then the exact wording of every passage is of the first importance.[2] In our interpretation and application of a Code of Law every word matters very much indeed. A single carelessly drafted clause may lead to almost unending confusion. In making laws the exact phraseology of every part of the enactment is of vital moment. The ideal of the legislator is to produce

[1] In this connexion I may perhaps be permitted to refer to my book *The Old Testament : Its Meaning and Value for the Church to-day*, pp. 5–8.

[2] This applies to the apostolic writings as well as to the Gospels.

something which admits of one interpretation only, and to make that interpretation so explicit and obvious that no one can remain in any doubt as to what it is.

The fact that more than one half of the entire legal profession spend more than half their time in trying to determine either what existing laws were originally intended to mean, or what they can be made to mean, or how they can be applied to circumstances which the framers of them did not foresee, indicates that the legislator's ideal is never perfectly realized in practice. Precedents have their place and value in religion as elsewhere. But a perfect collection of precedents never has existed and never will.

For this reason Law is always liable to change. Old laws become obsolete, and useless or even pernicious. New circumstances require new enactments. Therefore just in so far as we try to treat the New Testament as if it were a Code of Law, we are doing our best to discredit its claim to permanent supremacy. No collection of precedents interpreted and applied in a legal or semi-legal way can stand unaltered for ever. It might survive for many centuries: but gradually it would be found to be more and more unworkable until at length it would have to be abandoned.[1]

But if we recognize that the Christian Scriptures are a body of principles, this difficulty does not arise.

In the first place it follows that they are to be read as a whole, and that the bearing of the different parts upon each other is to be taken into account. Otherwise we can hardly fail to misunderstand them.

Secondly: The exact wording of a particular passage, or the particular details of any given incident, cease to be of the first importance. What matters is the general tenor of the story and the meaning which it is intended to convey.[2]

[1] Many modern anti-Christian writers adopt this line of argument—e.g. G. L. Dickinson in *Letters from John Chinaman*. In other words they assume that the New Testament is something which it is not and then proceed to argue that it can be of no service to the modern world. But it must be admitted that the Christian Church has furnished them with some excuse for their error.

[2] It is not meant that the report of our Lord's sayings and actions is not sufficiently accurate to be counted a trustworthy guide: but

Thirdly: The fear that the New Testament will ever become obsolete lapses altogether. Principles can always be permanent, and experience shows that they are indestructible, if they are high enough to begin with. Their value is constant. The only variation which they admit is in the method of their application. One great danger which constantly besets the Church is that of confusing a particular method of applying a principle (which may have worked well for several centuries) with the principle itself: and no type of blunder is likely to prove more expensive in the long run.

It is admittedly more difficult to grasp the principles which the New Testament contains than to tabulate the precedents which can be extracted from it. But we cannot expect the profitable study of God's word to be anything but an exacting task.

In the record of the Revelation of God's Son, and in other writings which throw light upon the effect which that Revelation produced upon the hearts and minds of those who were first brought into contact with it, we possess books which all Christians agree in regarding as of unique, permanent, and inestimable value. Nothing else which has been, or ever can be, written can take their place, or even rank with them. Therefore it follows that to win from them all that they have to give must tax all our powers heavily. But as God has entrusted these writings to the custody of the Church we need not fear that He has set us an impossible task in them. He will make us able, as He alone can, to rise to the height of His demands. And if we study His word to the best of our ability we shall discover for ourselves the truth of the ancient promise *Them that are meek shall He guide in judgement: and such as are gentle them shall He learn His way.*[1]

This last paragraph may seem to some to be no more than an attempt to make the best of what is in reality a bad business.

merely that we cannot assume absolute accuracy in all details on the part of the Evangelists, and that we need not wish to do so. What we may venture to call the style of His utterances is uniform and distinctive to a degree which carries conviction that our records of them are truthful. The same may be said, perhaps, about some of the sayings ascribed to Him by early Christian tradition, but not recorded in the Gospel.

[1] *Ps.* 25[8].

It may be thought that the authority of the Gospels [1] has been seriously shaken by critical study, and that we can no longer read them as we used. Formerly men could say of them, 'These are the very words of God'. Now we know that what we have is the form which the story of our Lord's Life, and the record of His sayings, had assumed after more than thirty years of oral tradition. It had been handed on from mouth to mouth, and was committed to writing by men whose knowledge of it was not first-hand. Therefore we can no longer appeal to it as we used to do. Our old confidence has been destroyed.

But those who feel thus should remember that the Christian religion professes to be the revelation of Him who is Himself the Truth. That is the foundation of its claim to universal supremacy. Therefore its first concern is with the Truth. No belief, however comforting or time-honoured, which is not true can have any place in it. The austerity of Truth is sometimes almost terrifying, but if we seem to mitigate it by introducing a judicious amount of consolatory falsehood, sooner or later a heavy reckoning will have to be paid. And no reverence, however deep, which has been inspired by anything save most scrupulous regard for Truth can be accounted pleasing in God's sight.

Moreover if we believe that God has revealed Himself to mankind in the Person of His Son we must also believe that the record of that revelation which He has put into our hands must be the one best fitted to further His work in the world. We may wish that the New Testament were other than it is. It is difficult not to think that it would be a gain if the Gospels were ten times their present length, so that we knew much which is now hidden from us. Sometimes we may even have regretted that S. Paul did not bequeath to us a comprehensive and detailed hand-book of Church Order, so that the vexed questions which now revolve round the office and work of a Bishop could never have arisen.

But desires and regrets such as these really indicate poverty of faith. We might as well contend that it would have been

[1] And to some extent of the apostolic writings as they are not all (in all probability) by the hands of apostles.

better if the Son of God had become Incarnate in some other station of life, or in some other part of the world, or at some other period of history.

What God has in fact given to us must be worth more to us than anything else could be; and no opinions which we may entertain about His gift can by any possibility enhance its real value. Indeed if our opinions are incorrect they must, so long as we hold them, diminish the value of the gift so far as we are concerned. The more thoroughly we understand it, the more clearly we perceive both what it is and what it is not, the more precious will it prove to be.

If we have brought faulty prepossessions (born perhaps of hasty assumptions as to the nature of Divine Inspiration) to our reading of the New Testament, that means that we have not gained from it as much as we might have done. If we have ascribed to it authority of a kind which does not in reality attach to it [1] we have impaired the authority which it ought to wield.

In the New Testament we possess a body of writings which we believe to be of unique and unalterable importance to the entire world. No other documents which exist possess a comparable claim upon the conscience and intellect of mankind. These books are not the property of any one age or nation, but of an imperishable international society, membership of which is not restricted by such accidents as race or sex or age or colour. They are not a local contribution to the sum-total of the world's inheritance which has to take its place by the side of other contributions derived from other sources. They contain the principles by which all human life under whatever conditions, in whatever quarter of the globe, is to be guided and sustained. Long and wide experience has shown that apart from these principles the load of civilization cannot be borne. Without them human character is not strong enough to shoulder the burden of its own achievements, and civilization collapses under

[1] e.g. by treating it as a quarry for precedents instead of as a body of coherent principles: or by assuming the verbal inerrancy of every detail: or by attributing to apostles books which are in fact by other hands.

its own weight.[1] This has happened more than once in the past, and if we are not witnessing a repetition of the catastrophe to-day we are at least trembling upon the verge of it. God has been pleased to transmit the knowledge of these saving truths to us in one particular way.[2] The more closely we study what He has given to us the more surely will the Holy Spirit guide us into all truth : so that we shall grasp much which is unseen, or only half seen as yet. For we believe that the greatest triumphs of Christ in the world are yet to come.

[1] cf. *1 Cor.* 2^6.

[2] cf. *2 Cor.* 47.

II

THE CANON

No one who applies himself to the study of Christianity, whether as critic or as disciple, can fail to recognize that the Church of history is a very remarkable institution. Conspicuous amongst its many peculiarities is the brief and informal character of its Sacred Writings.

The Church places in the forefront of its credentials certain writings which it regards as of unique value and unalterable importance. No addition has been made to these books for eighteen hundred years, though much has been written about them in the way of comment and explanation. And it is now inconceivable that any addition should be made. These writings, known collectively as *The New Testament*, stand apart and alone. Whole-hearted acceptance of them as the rule and ultimate standard of faith is, and always has been, an indispensable condition of membership of the Church. It is one of the foundations upon which alone the visible unity of Christ's body can be rebuilt.[1]

Yet no one of these documents is by the hand of the Founder of Christianity, nor were any of them written during His life on earth.[2]

Excluding the Old Testament, which the Church inherited from the Jews and shares with them, the Christian Scriptures number but twenty-seven in all. They consist of twenty-one letters, four short memoirs, one treatise which might be entitled *Wayside Sketches in the Early History of the Church*, and one which may be most conveniently described as *A Christian Prophecy*.

[1] See *Report of the Lambeth Conference of 1920*, p. 28. Resolution VI.

[2] For a complete list of the books of the New Testament arranged in chronological order see Appendix A.

The letters are by eight different hands:[1] thirteen of the total number being contributed by S. Paul. The authors of *Hebrews*, *2 Peter*, and *Jude* cannot be identified positively: and a cloud of uncertainty surrounds the author (or authors) of the three letters which bear the name of *John*.

The letters are all genuine: that is to say, they are real *Letters* intended primarily for special occasions and not for all time. We shall be liable to misread them if we forget that. Three of them only partake of the nature of formal treatises (*Romans*,[2] *Ephesians*,[3] *Hebrews*[4]), and they are astonishingly brief in view of the momentous questions with which they deal.

In no case have we got the other side of the correspondence, which in some instances (e.g. that of the Church of Corinth) undoubtedly existed. We can only infer its nature from the side which we do possess.

Of these twenty-one letters four certainly (*1* and *2 Timothy*, *Titus*, and *Philemon*), and probably six (*2* and *3 John*[5]), were originally private communications addressed to individuals.

Two (*James* and *1 Peter*) are addressed to *The Dispersion*. This was the title which had been given to the Jewish colonies which were to be found in most of the principal towns of the Roman Empire. It therefore looks as if these epistles were meant for Christians of Jewish blood. But this does not necessarily follow. The Church was often regarded as *The New Israel*, so that Christians outside Palestine might be addressed collectively as *The Dispersion* whether they were Jews by race or not.

Jude seems to have been occasioned by a crisis caused by false teachers. *2 Peter* is meant for any Christian reader.

Hebrews and *1 John* contain no particular address or dedication. But the contents of the former leave no room for doubt that it was intended for those who had tried to retain their

[1] Assuming that *Hebrews* is not by S. Paul, that *2 Peter* is not by S. Peter, and that *2 and 3 John* (which are obviously by the same hand) are not by the author of *1 John*.

[2] *On Justification by Faith.* [3] Encyclical *On the Church.*

[4] *On the Value and Limitations of the Mosaic Law.*

[5] It is uncertain whether *the elect lady* and *Gaius* of these epistles are intended to be individuals or not.

ancestral Jewish religion side by side with Christianity,[1] but were now being compelled by force of circumstances to make a final choice one way or the other.

1 John cannot be dissociated from the Fourth Gospel, and must therefore have been intended for the Christian world generally.

The remaining nine, which are all by the hand of S. Paul, are addressed to particular churches [2]—i.e. to local communities of Christians in different places. Three of these places (Galatia, Ephesus, and Colossae) are in what is known to us as Asia Minor: three (Thessalonica, Philippi, and Corinth) are in the Greek-speaking part of Europe. The last is addressed to the Church at Rome, the capital of the civilized world.

The Four Memoirs of our Lord are not sufficiently full to enable us to compile from them a connected account of His Life containing all that we should like to know. Beyond repeated references to the searching character of His gaze, they give us no hint whatever as to His personal appearance. We know more details of the personal history of Mahomet than of Christ.

The fact that *Acts* does not aim at being a complete history is shown by the fact that more than half of it is occupied with the travels and adventures of S. Paul. James the son of Zebedee is the only one of the Twelve whose death it records.[3] For the history of the Apostles (with the exception of certain episodes in the life of S. Peter) after the Day of Pentecost we have to gather what information we can from sources outside the New Testament.

The incomplete and scanty nature of the literary origins of Christianity must be a constant source of astonishment to all

[1] cf. *Acts* 6^{7}.

[2] But it is probable that *Ephesians* was not intended for the Church at Ephesus exclusively. It is of the nature of what is called in modern language *an encyclical*—i.e. it was meant to be passed round all churches. It is inscribed *To the Saints which are at*—and the blank could be filled up with the name of each particular church in turn. The size and pre-eminence of the Church of Ephesus probably led to more than one copy being made for its use, and so the word *Ephesus* came to be inseparably attached to the epistle. The same may be true of *Romans*. See below. Chapter III, pp. 74, 77.

[3] 12^{2}.

who study them. It suggests at once that the Church cannot be built entirely upon a Book. However great the importance of its sacred writings may be, the Church could not have become what it is if they were the only source of its life.

No less remarkable is the informal character of a large part of the Christian Scriptures. The Books of the New Testament might without irreverence be described as 'a miscellaneous collection'. Except for the Gospels, *Acts*, and perhaps *Romans* and *Ephesians*, they are not such as we should naturally have anticipated. We should not have expected letters to form so large a part of the collection,[1] nor perhaps that so many different authors should have contributed. One full, lengthy, and finally authoritative document,[2] either from the hand of the Founder Himself, or by one of His immediate disciples working under His eye, would naturally have seemed to us to be a more satisfactory documentary foundation for a new religion. But God has led His Church by a more excellent way.

It is, moreover, quite certain that the authors of the Letters did not regard themselves as adding to the existing Scriptures. The only writings which they recognized as *Inspired* were the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which they all (with the possible exception of S. Luke [3]) had been brought up to revere from their cradles. When they spoke of *the Scriptures* [4] they meant the Old Testament and nothing else. In their eyes the idea that any other writings could ever rank with these would have appeared profane, if not downright blasphemous. The same is probably true of the Evangelists. The only book of the New Testament which seems to claim Scriptural authority for itself is the *Revelation of S. John*.[5] And this is cast in a mould with which the Jewish world had long been familiar. It employs what might almost be called Official Phraseology of a type which had been sanctioned by the usage of more than a century.

This view of the nature of the New Testament may appear to some to be a serious and damaging admission. If the authors

[1] Rather more than one-third. [2] Such as the Koran.

[3] There is good reason for thinking that he was a Gentile. But he might have been a Jewish proselyte before he became a Christian.

[4] e.g. *Rom.* 1^{2}, 15^{4}, 16^{26}, *2 Tim.* 3^{15}, *2 Pet.* 3^{16}.

[5] 19^{9}, $22^{6, 7}$, $22^{18, 19}$.

did not regard themselves as writing anything which could rightly be described as *Scripture*, how has it come about that their books occupy the first place in the estimation of the Christian world? Is not the importance which the Church attaches to them excessive?

These are pertinent questions; the more so as the comparatively slight and apparently somewhat fortuitous nature of the Christian Canon is sometimes used as an argument by those who wish to discredit its authority.

The enemies of Christianity (whose hostility is not always inspired solely by intellectual considerations) are naturally anxious to shake the authority of the New Testament if they can.[1] They are therefore fond of asserting that it is an arbitrary collection, made at haphazard by an uncritical and superstitious age which was ready to accept as Scripture anything which might be offered for its consumption. And it is sometimes implied that the authorities of the Church knew perfectly well that these documents were in reality of little value, but employed them to shore up a system which motives of self-interest made them anxious to maintain.[2]

It is even stated, with every appearance of seriousness, that at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 some forty *Gospels* (all presumably of equal value in the eyes of the assembly) were placed upon the floor of the Council Chamber. Prayer was offered that God would show which of them were to be accepted as true history. Our four Gospels rose from the ground and came to rest upon the table, and were received as inspired on the strength of the miracle.

It is not easy to decide whether ignorance or impudence is the chief constituent of those who retail a story so preposterous. But the fact that it is used for purposes of 'Rationalist' propaganda makes it necessary to explain briefly how the New

[1] The more so as in the circles to which their propaganda is chiefly directed it is an axiom that the written word of the New Testament is the *only* foundation of the Christian religion.

[2] It is difficult to see how self-interest could have induced any one to become or to remain a Christian during the first three centuries. Until 311 Christianity was always illegal in the Roman Empire, and although the law was not always enforced any Christian knew that he might suffer for his faith at any moment.

Testament has come to be what it is. In other words—to sketch the history of the Christian Canon.[1]

Before the end of the second century the writings of Irenaeus [2] and Tertullian [3] attest the fact that there was a definite Canon of Scripture in existence. That is to say—There were certain books which the Church regarded as authoritative. These books were accepted in every part of the Christian world, which meant an area extending from the Atlantic Ocean on the West to the Euphrates on the East (including the North coast of Africa) and from the First Cataract of the Nile on the South to the Danube on the North.[4] They constituted a final Court of Appeal by which the speculations of individuals, or the claims of other Christian writings, were to be tested. But as neither of these two writers gives us a formal list of his *Canon* we can only infer what books it contained. The margin of uncertainty is, however, small.

About the year 155 Tatian, an Assyrian, tried to write a *Life of Christ*, or a *Harmony of the Gospels*,[5] which he called *According to the Four*. The only Gospels of which he made use were the four known to us, though he occasionally supplements them from other parts of the New Testament, or from current tradition. We can therefore say that by the middle of the second century our four Gospels had come to occupy a pre-eminent and unquestionable place in the estimation of the Christian world. No rivals to them were recognized.

Fuller evidence is afforded by the earliest translations. Before the last quarter of the second century a Latin Version of the New Testament had been made, probably for the use of the Christians of North Africa, Italy, and Gaul,[6] to most of whom

[1] The word Canon is Greek and means first of all *a measuring rod*. Then it comes to mean a *rule*, and so was naturally applied to authoritative writings. It is also used of the decisions of Church Councils.

[2] Born at Smyrna. Bishop of Lyons 177.

[3] Born at Carthage about 155. Died about 230. The first great Christian writer who used Latin.

[4] It is not of course meant that the whole of this immense area had become Christian. But Churches were in existence at various places throughout the whole of it.

[5] *Diatessaron*.

[6] The author of the *Epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne* appears to have used a Latin Bible in 177.

Greek was an unknown tongue. It only exists in fragments now, but we can see that it contained all our Canon, with the exception of *S. James*, *2 S. Peter*, and *Hebrews*.

The earliest Syriac version which was probably made before the end of the second century,[1] contains all the New Testament except *2 S. Peter*, *2* and *3 S. John*, *S. Jude*, and the *Revelation of S. John*.

The Egyptian versions,[2] which may be assigned to approximately the same date, omit nothing except the *Revelation of S. John*.

More striking still is the evidence of what is called the *Muratorian fragment*.[3] This is the first known attempt to draw up a formal list of the books recognized as canonical by the Catholic Church. It exists in a Latin version which is a rough translation from a Greek original, the date of which can be fixed with reasonable certainty between the years 160 and 170.

The beginning has been torn off, but as the first words refer to S. Mark's Gospel, and the third and fourth places are assigned to S. Luke and to S. John, we may assume that S. Matthew occupied the first place. For the rest it recognizes all our New Testament, with the exception of *1* and *2 S. Peter*, *S. James*, and *Hebrews*. It is however possible that *Hebrews* is referred to under the title of the *Epistle to the Alexandrians*, which is said to have been 'forged under the name of Paul'. The author also knows of an epistle *To the Laodiceans* which he rejects and includes a *Revelation of S. Peter* which he admits 'some will not have read in the Church'.

So much has been written about the history of the New Testament Canon by so many hands,[4] that it is unnecessary to pursue the subject at greater length here.

1 Made for the inhabitants of the extreme East of the Roman Empire, who had never learned to speak Greek. They are represented by the Assyrian Christians to-day.

2 Made for the dwellers up the Nile, the ancestors of the modern Copts, to whom the Greek of Alexandria was a foreign language.

3 The name is derived from the fact that it was first published in 1740 by Muratori. Printed by Bishop Westcott in *The Canon of the New Testament*. Appendix C.

4 cf. Westcott, *The Canon of the New Testament* and *The Bible in the*

The salient fact is that three converging lines of evidence, namely, the implicit testimony of Christian writers, the three early translations made for the outlying parts of the Christian world, and the direct testimony of a formal list, show that before the end of the second century a Christian Canon was recognized. Certain books were regarded as of pre-eminent value and authority, and were read for public edification in all Churches. There was very little doubt as to what these books were. Where there was any uncertainty (as in the case of *2 S. Peter, S. Jude, and 2 and 3 S. John*) it was probably due to the fact that, for fairly obvious reasons, copies of these books had not been multiplied rapidly, and therefore a longer period of time was bound to elapse before they could become universally known.

The acceptance of the *Revelation of S. John* may have been delayed by its obscurity, and by the Jewish mould in which it is cast. It was not unnatural that some doubt should be felt as to whether it were suitable for public reading in Church. This need not have meant that its abstract value was in question. We do not read all the Old Testament in Church now.

But although the Canon of the New Testament was fixed, within narrow limits, before the end of the second century,[1] it was not finally stereotyped until the beginning of the fourth. In what is known as *The Great Persecution* (303–13) the Roman government made a systematic attempt to extirpate Christianity. Among the edicts published was one requiring Christians to surrender, on pain of death, all copies of all their sacred books, in the hope that if these were destroyed the religion would expire quietly.

Naturally they were anxious to comply with the law as far as possible, and they had therefore to decide what books might be surrendered, and what were more valuable than life itself. Thus a clear and decisive line was finally drawn, though the

Church. Sanday, *The Gospels in the Second Century.* Nicol, *The Four Gospels in the Earliest Church History,* &c. This last contains a very useful bibliography.

[1] Early in the third century Origen of Alexandria seems to have regarded the *Shepherd* of Hermas (a work comparable with the *Pilgrim's Progress,* written about 155 A.D.) as Scripture. It is placed at the end of the New Testament in the great Sinaitic Codex of the fourth century.

margin of uncertainty had been very small for more than a century.[1]

This brief sketch will be sufficient to indicate the nature of the process by which the New Testament, as we know it, was brought into being. Just as we do not owe the documents which make up the Christian Scriptures to a single hand, so we do not owe the position which they hold to the decision of any individual, nor even of any Council. The roots of the New Testament strike deeper than that. They are inextricably intertwined with the common life of the Church. The New Testament has not been formed by a single judgement, which might subsequently be regarded as erroneous or arbitrary and could therefore be revoked as quickly as it was passed. It grew with the growth and experience of the Church. It rests upon the gradual, voluntary agreement of the Christian world.[2]

The groups of Christians scattered widely over a contemptuous or actively hostile world found that certain books were of unique value to them in their efforts to lead the highest possible kind of life. For maintaining their grasp of the truths which had been revealed in Christ against speculations which threatened either to obscure them or to explain them away, for guidance amid the ethical difficulties which beset them at every turn, certain books proved capable of furnishing a help and encouragement which no others could supply. Experience proved (as it has proved ever since) that their value remained the same under all circumstances. And to say that experience has proved a religious writing to be of unique and permanent value is only a longer way of calling it *Inspired*.

It is not surprising that the Church hesitated for a while in some cases as to which of the writings which it possessed deserved to rank as Scripture. The marvel is that the decision was reached with such speed, and with so little doubt or controversy.

1 The Jewish Canon of the Old Testament had been stereotyped in precisely the same way by the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes nearly five hundred years before.

2 *Communis Christiani orbis sensus* is the phrase which best expresses the way in which the decision was reached. It has no exact equivalent in English.

Our Canon does not include by any means all that it might have contained. There were a very large number of Apocryphal Gospels, Epistles, and Acts, many of which exist in whole or in part now. Some of them are of very early date, and may possibly embody scraps of true tradition.[1]

It is worth while to call attention to the existence of these works because they show that the collection which we regard as sacred was not made in any haphazard fashion. It is the outcome of a process of selection. The Christians of the second century were not prepared to accept without hesitation any books which professed to give authentic accounts of our Lord's life, or to express the mind of any of the Apostles. They weeded out claimants for the rank of Scripture, even when they professed to be the work of Apostles, with an unsparing hand. The books of which they finally approved were probably not more than about one-quarter of those with which they were acquainted. And a very brief examination of the rejected works is sufficient to vindicate the Church's choice.

The Apocryphal Gospels present some features of interest. But speaking generally they are childish. Naturally they revel in the miraculous, but the majority of the miracles which they attribute to our Lord do not rise above the level of conjuring tricks. None of them is of any spiritual value: some even border on the malicious. We have only to compare them with the canonical Gospels to see what imagination, unhampered by knowledge of the facts, was likely to make of the Divine Life. Sometimes the writer is obviously trying to make out some definite point of view which the Church has rejected. Such comparison leaves no room for doubt that our evangelists were at least doing all that lay in them to adhere as closely as possible to what they honestly believed to be historic truth.

There are also other early works which, while they do not lay

[1] e.g. *The Gospel according to the Egyptians, The Gospel according to the Hebrews, The Gospel of the Infancy, The Gospel of Nicodemus, The Acts of Paul and Thecla, The Epistle of Barnabas,* &c. These Gospels were rejected upon the ground that they were not true history. Our Lord's Childhood, and what passed at the *Descent into Hell* were naturally topics which excited curiosity. As no trustworthy information about either was available its place was supplied by flights of fancy.

claim to apostolic authorship, might by reason of their early date have come to be included in the New Testament.

First amongst these is the epistle of S. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians. This is a perfectly genuine document, and does not profess to be anything which in fact it is not. It is a letter written by the Bishop of Rome [1] to the Church of Corinth about the year A.D. 95.[2] The Church of Corinth was distracted by faction, and S. Clement wrote urging them to compose their differences, pointing out that disorder of any kind is contrary to the Mind of God.

Next come the epistles of S. Ignatius. He was Bishop of Antioch in Syria, and was brought to Rome to suffer martyrdom about the year 110. During his journey he wrote to the Churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna. He also addressed a personal letter to S. Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna.

These letters are very interesting, especially for the light which they throw upon the author's conception of the episcopal office. On this ground their genuineness has been impugned. But it has been established beyond question by Bishop Lightfoot.[3]

To these must be added a curious work, which only came to light in 1883, commonly called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.[4]

This consists of a number of moral precepts which the author appears to have borrowed from the Epistle of Barnabas,[5] and to have adapted to suit his own purpose. To these he has appended what purports to be a manual of Church Order. It would be beside our present purpose to attempt to analyse this

[1] According to tradition S. Clement was the fourth Bishop of Rome, his predecessors being S. Peter, Linus, and Cletus, or Anencletus.

[2] It may therefore be anterior to the Fourth Gospel and *1 S. John*.

[3] *Apostolic Fathers* (Macmillan 1889).

[4] The full title is *The Teaching of the Lord by the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles*. For a full discussion of its date, origin, and value see *Barnabas, Hermas, and the Didache* by J. A. Robinson (S.P.C.K. 1920).

[5] *Barnabas* hovered for a time on the outskirts of the Canon. It is an attempt to deal with the same problem as that which prompted *Hebrews*, namely, the place of the Old Testament in the Christian Church, with the difference that it was written for Gentile readers. It may belong to the first century. Though far inferior to *Hebrews* it was more immediately successful.

in detail. But if it is a description of the writer's own Church as it actually was, he must have been a member of a very curious community. Nothing parallel with his Church is known to us elsewhere. It has disappeared without leaving any other trace behind, and it is very difficult to see in what part of the world it could have been situated.

It is therefore probable that it never did exist. The book appears to belong to the second half of the second century—or possibly to the third, and to represent no more than what a somewhat imaginative writer thought he could deduce from the New Testament as to what the constitution of the Church ought to be.

These documents are all of interest and value. But when we read them it is impossible not to feel that we have passed into an atmosphere altogether different from that of the New Testament. There is nothing creative about any of them. S. Clement is wise and reasonable, but exhibits no spark of genius. S. Ignatius is an heroic and pathetic figure, whose martyrdom did much for the Church. But his thoughts are a jumble of S. John and S. Paul. And *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* does not profess to be more than a reproduction in convenient form of what the Church had inherited.

If we were to collect all the extant Christian writings down to (say) the year A.D. 170 and were then to classify them according to their intrinsic merit we should find ourselves compelled to draw a line almost exactly where the Church has drawn it. We might hesitate a little as to which side of it we should place *2 Peter*, *2* and *3 John*, and *Jude*: but so did the Church. As to the other books there would be no doubt. And our decision would not depend upon our personal religious faith. If we approached the New Testament not as disciples but merely as critics the result would be the same. We might reject the moral teaching of the epistles, but we should have to admit that the authors were men of real spiritual and intellectual power who were not ashamed of their convictions.

The author of the *Revelation of S. John* is aflame with hatred of unreality in religion, and feels the bitter and unrelenting nature of the struggle between Good and Evil with an intensity

which most of us cannot pretend to share. He also exhibits a confidence as to how the immemorial war will end, which is conspicuously absent from our world. Indeed, in his eyes the victory has been won already.[1]

The more closely we examine *Acts*, testing its accuracy from other sources whenever possible, the more clearly does it appear that the author must be ranked with the great historians of the world. He reveals an unerring eye for the essential, as distinct from the obvious, in his narrative, and a notable power of conveying it in a few masterly touches.[2]

If the Gospels are romances the authors are the first of all novelists. The least which can be said of them is that their consummate genius has created a Character with which the fiction of the world presents no parallel. The Hero of the Gospel has compelled an attention which has never been accorded to Achilles or Aeneas, to Hamlet or King Lear.[3]

If we review all the Christian literature which exists down to the year A.D. 170 we find that the earlier part of it is obviously and markedly superior to the later. The difference may be less conspicuous in some cases than in others, but it can never be denied or explained away. The books of the Canon are marked by a peculiar depth, vigour, and freshness, and these are the books which the Christian world counts *Inspired*. The Church's choice needs no justification beyond that which is afforded by the contents of the writings on which it fell. And as these are not all by one hand we cannot account for them by the hypothesis of one transcendent genius. Such figures do appear from time to time in the course of the world's history. They stand out from among their contemporaries in isolated splendour, and we accept them as a phenomenon which we cannot explain.

But here we have to do with several authors whose personal characteristics differ very widely. It therefore follows that some

[1] *Rev.* $1^{1}5$, $15^{3, 4}$, $19^{1, 2}$. The character and value of the book are unaffected if it should be by more than one hand.

[2] cf. Sir W. Ramsay, S. *Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* (Hodder & Stoughton).

[3] Tennyson's failure to create a satisfying ideal of manhood in King Arthur is very notable. Guinevere could not say of Jesus of Nazareth what she says of Arthur.

notable creative impulse must have struck the circle to which they belonged. The exact source and nature of the impulse may be a matter for investigation and discussion. But that there was such an impulse does not admit of question. And it must be looked for, like all other similar impulses, in the sphere of history.[1] That is to say—Something must have happened (for the moment it does not matter what) to produce the result with which we are in fact confronted.

Regarded from the literary standpoint alone the New Testament is a very remarkable phenomenon. Little more than fifty years separate its earliest [2] from its latest [3] book. A single lifetime could have witnessed the production of it all.

It was not, like the Old Testament, ground slowly out of the history of a Nation covering many centuries. It appears abruptly —almost as the goddess Athene was fabled to have started full-grown from the head of her father Zeus. Suddenly the somewhat sterile soil of Palestinian Judaism, which knew full well that its greatness lay in the past,[4] is quickened into new life. And the new impulse (as far as literary production is concerned) disappears as suddenly and as mysteriously as it came.

And it is noteworthy that this period of exceptionally intense spiritual fertility comes to an end at just about the time when the last survivor of those who had been eyewitnesses of the events described in the Gospel [5] must in the course of nature have passed away.

[1] e.g. The Invention of Printing, The Discovery of America, The Fall of Constantinople, which all produced a very stimulating effect upon the intellectual life of Europe. Or in England, The Rejection of the Papal Supremacy in the sixteenth century, or the Victory over Napoleon (and the material prosperity which followed it) at the beginning of the nineteenth.

[2] *1 Thess.* [3] The Fourth Gospel or *1 S. John.*

[4] This statement may seem to be at variance with the anticipation of a Messiah who was yet to come. But current belief did not expect Him to do more than restore the glories of David and Solomon, as a prelude to the winding up of all human history. The impression produced by our Lord on many minds was *that one of the old prophets was risen again.* The expectation was of a restoration of former splendours which the present could not rival nor the future surpass.

[5] Even if the Gospels are regarded as romances the date at which the story is laid is fixed by the mention of Pontius Pilate. A person who had reached manhood during the time that Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judaea might have lived until near 100 A.D.

But Christian reverence for the New Testament does not rest upon its literary excellence, nor even primarily upon its ethical teaching. Christianity is not primarily a system of philosophy nor a moral code, and much of its significance will be missed if we attempt to treat it as if it were. It professes to be an historical religion : and by that claim it must ultimately stand or fall. It can never disavow its origins, nor cut itself loose from its past.

From the philosophical standpoint the difficulty in the way of believing that any historical event can be of eternal significance is immense, and we have seen more than one ingenious attempt to circumvent it.[1] But with such plausible substitutes for the Christian religion the Church is not particularly concerned. The Church is an historic institution, and takes its stand upon a foundation of historic fact. It faces the difficulty boldly, and calls us to maintain that certain historical facts are of eternal value and significance. This is the preliminary venture of faith which is demanded of all who call themselves by Christ's name. If we are not prepared to make it we had better leave Christianity alone altogether.

The historical value of the New Testament constitutes its first and strongest claim upon us. The Church's attitude towards its beliefs might be summed up briefly thus—' Certain things have actually happened. They happened unexpectedly. No one foresaw them. No one could have reckoned upon them. They are extraordinary to the verge of being incredible. But they did take place. And the effect of them has been to give men an entirely new view of their relation towards God and towards each other. This was felt at once. How far-reaching the effect may ultimately prove to be we cannot yet say. We dare not affirm that we have fully grasped the significance of the facts. But they are historic facts, and are therefore unchangeable. Some of our sacred books record the facts. Others attest them, and show how those upon whom they burst first tried to apply them to their lives. Therefore these books can never be supplanted by any others. But the foundation of all their value

[1] By Professor Eucken and his disciples in Germany, and by some of the Modernist School in the Roman Church.

lies in the historical facts, which some of them record directly, and others attest in more indirect fashion.'

As soon as we have recognized that the first claim of Christianity upon us springs from its historical foundation, it becomes evident that the somewhat informal character of a large part of the Christian Scriptures enhances their value. Formal history is always to some extent 'suspect'. The personal bias of the author must colour his narrative, and may distort it very seriously. The historian may be concerned overmuch with trying to make out a case. His aim may be so to arrange and present the facts as to support his own personal interpretation of them. The extent to which this is legitimate depends upon the correctness of his interpretation. If he is mistaken as to the true meaning of what he records his narrative will be altogether misleading. Consciously or unconsciously he will tend to ignore facts which ought to be recorded, because they do not harmonize with his own preconceived ideas. A good historian will not be guilty of such misrepresentation, but the possibility that any given historian has been guilty of it cannot be left out of sight by his readers.[1]

Moreover, if the historian is dealing with events of which he was not an eyewitness the sources upon which he has to depend for his information may have been incomplete or untrustworthy.

In other words, the contents of any document which professes to be formal history, and to have been written for publication, are always open to criticism, and it is unlikely that their truth will ever admit of demonstration.

But when we are dealing with letters the case is very different. Letters are not as a rule intended primarily for publication, and are therefore free from the suspicion which attaches to more formal treatises.[2] They reveal the real mind and character of

[1] Thus an attempt has been made to treat *Acts* as a forgery of the second century composed with the idea of effecting a reconciliation between the Petrine and Pauline parties in the Church. Before we take this view seriously we are entitled to ask for some evidence that a temporary difference of opinion between the two apostles (*Gal.* 2^{11-21}) split the Church into two hostile camps which continued for eighty years after they were both dead.

[2] Four of S. Paul's letters are entirely private (*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*). Of the rest *Ephesians* only seems to have been intended for

the author as nothing else, except actual personal intercourse, ever can. If we want to understand a man with whom for any reason we cannot speak face to face, if we want to know what he really thought, believed, hoped, feared, and desired, his letters will be of more value to us than anything else.

The direct historical value of any correspondence is very great, not only as a revelation of the author's mind, but for the light which it throws upon the general conditions of his time. An historical fact which appears in a contemporary, or approximately contemporary letter, may generally be accepted as true without demur—for the very reason that the author was not trying to write history. He has no reason for wishing to mislead his correspondent, who is very likely to be in a position to check what he reads by his own knowledge. When historical facts are referred to in letters it shows that they were matters of common knowledge in the circle to which the writer and his correspondent belonged.

Most valuable of all are the implications and assumptions of letters : that is to say the facts which they attest indirectly.

The primary object of a letter is that it should be intelligible to the particular person who receives it. Therefore the references made by the writer show the nature and extent of the knowledge which he can assume the recipient to possess. What was perfectly clear to the person immediately concerned may be very obscure to an outsider into whose hands the letter comes.

A correspondence cannot be carried on without a considerable foundation of knowledge common to the two parties. Otherwise incessant explanations and notes would swell every letter to an inordinate and impossible length.[1] For letters are of necessity brief. A very long letter contains less than a single chapter of an ordinary book.

general circulation—and that only among Christians. S. Paul probably never contemplated a copy of it finding its way into heathen hands. The others may be called semi-private as they were intended for particular communities, with which (with the exception of the Church of Rome) he was already personally acquainted.

[1] Such a book as the edition of Queen Victoria's letters, published by Messrs. Longmans in 1908, affords a good illustration of the amount of explanation required to make a correspondence intelligible a generation afterwards to readers for whom it was not intended.

This fact seems sometimes to be overlooked by those who build much upon what is called *the argument from silence*. It is sometimes held that if a given writer does not mention something which he might have mentioned, that proves either that he did not know of it or that our chronology is at fault, and that the event had not yet in reality taken place. Occasionally this argument is a strong one. But as a rule its value seems to be overrated, particularly when it is applied to the early documents of Christianity. There is no reason why any apostolic writer should necessarily have said everything which he might have said. If an important event is passed over in silence (particularly in a letter written avowedly for some special occasion) it need not mean that the author did not know of it, or even that he did not think it important. On the contrary, it may mean that it was too well known to everybody concerned to need specific mention.[1]

There is probably no correspondence dealing with important matters in existence sufficiently full to tell us all that we should like to know. Certainly the twenty-one letters which have won their way to a place in the Christian Scriptures are not a complete record of the first two generations of Christianity. But if the light which they throw must be regarded as fitful, the fact that they are letters written for their own time, without any thought of dictating to or even of instructing posterity, makes that light more valuable than any which could be derived from any other source.

From the standpoint of an historical and practical religion, that is, of a religion which affirms that it exists because certain momentous events did actually take place, and that the effect of these events is intended to pervade all life, down to the minutest details of daily conduct, for a religion which is offered to us on these terms and upon no others, it can be no matter for regret that the apostolic writings are not other than they are. No more formal treatises would have served our need so well. Letters illuminate as no other writings could what the first

[1] Probably most of us wrote a good many letters between August 1914 and November 1918 which contained no reference to the War. But that did not mean that there was no war, or no war which we thought important, in progress at the time of writing.

generation of Christians believed, and what manner of life they tried to live as the outcome of their beliefs. The picture might be compared with a dissected map. It has to be fitted together carefully piece by piece, and no one piece can be forced into any place which is not its own. But as each piece goes in the whole design takes shape gradually before our eyes.

The apostolic letters show us Christianity at work—for the first time, and in the days nearest to the tremendous events which gave it birth: in days when men who had been eye-witnesses of these events were still to be found.

Both directly and indirectly the letters show us the supernatural background of the Christian life, which constitutes alike its justification and its possibility. But they do not stop at theory. They also show us some of the difficulties which had to be met by those who were trying to walk in *The Way*; [1] and the dangers which beset them and might have brought them to utter disaster.

Again, because they are letters they have nothing in common with the rigidity of a Code. A Code or Manual of any kind must necessarily be deeply affected by the circumstances of the time and place to which it belongs. When these have undergone complete change the regulations designed for them become to a large extent unworkable and must be allowed to become obsolete.

If the New Testament were what some people seem to think it ought to be, it could be of little value to the Church to-day. If the apostolic writers had thought of themselves as composing Scripture for all time, and had tried to supply the Church with such guidance as that conception of their office would naturally have prompted them to produce, they would have failed. Unless *Inspiration* be conceived as something very crude and mechanical (a view to which the only Inspired Writings which we possess lend no support whatever) no *Inspiration* which God can bestow or men receive could have averted that failure. No men living in the first century of the Roman Empire could have pictured to themselves the world in which we live and move and have our being. If they had tried to prescribe for its needs fully and in detail their prescription would have been equally useless then and now.

[1] The oldest name for Christianity. cf. *Acts* 9^2.

The apostolic writings do not attempt to dictate to us exactly what we ought to say and do. They reveal, to a large extent unintentionally, the common beliefs of the Church during the first and most creative period of its history. They alone do so. Therefore they are unique and priceless. Because their testimony is largely unintentional—we might almost say unconscious—it is for that very reason the more trustworthy and valuable.

All Christians are agreed that, because the essential fundamental beliefs of the Church are not human inventions, but what we have been taught of God, therefore, they are unchangeable. They can neither gain nor lose from their surroundings. They are the same at all times, in all places, under all conceivable circumstances. The question of their obsolescence never does and never can arise.

The precise way in which they are to be applied to daily life varies considerably from time to time. To discover it and act up to it is the tax which God places upon the faith, courage, devotion, and intelligence of every age.

The apostolic writings give us some light (at least enough for our encouragement) on the first attempts at such application which were ever made. They were made under circumstances of the greatest difficulty. The first Christians had to contend with a weight of inherited tradition and prejudice, both religious and social, such as we cannot realize. India and China afford the only parallels to-day. If we do not know as much as we should like about their perplexities, their efforts, their triumphs, and their failures, we do at least know enough to shame us out of any thought of surrendering to our own difficulties.

This, in a word, is what the apostolic letters give us, and they give it better than anything else could—because they are letters. The more we consider the whole question the more clearly can we see that no other type of writings could have served us as well as these. Therefore in the fact that we possess them we are bold to trace the operation of the Holy Spirit. To Him we owe that S. Paul and S. Peter, S. James, S. John and S. Jude [1]

[1] Using the traditional titles, whether the authors of some of the letters were the apostles whose names they bear or not. The contents are more important than the authorship.

wrote as they did. To Him we owe the just judgement of the Church, which has raised these letters to a level which the authors did not contemplate, and has included them in the Scriptures of the New Covenant. Our recognition of His action is summed up in a single word when we call these writings *Inspired.* Our first justification for the use of the word lies in the collective judgement of the Christian Society. We call them *Inspired* because the Church has given them that title. Their right to the distinction is further attested by the conscience of the individual reader.

It is rather fashionable now in some circles [1] to speak contemptuously of the epistles, and an epithet not unfrequently applied to them is *laboured.* Admittedly S. Paul is not a particularly lucid writer: but both he and the readers whom he had in view were more concerned with the substance of what he had to say than with the form in which he expressed it. It is also to be remembered that he presumably expected his letters to be read straight through at once. He did not contemplate the division of them into somewhat arbitrary sections which would be read one at a time, as is our practice in Public Worship.

Disparaging criticisms of S. Paul seem generally to proceed from people whose knowledge of the content of Christianity is both slight and inaccurate. The severest critics are those who obviously sit very loosely to Christianity, or those who have never pretended to accept it at all. To them it must therefore be pointed out that the apostolic writings were never intended for those that are without. Probably, in fact, great pains were taken to keep them from the knowledge of unbelievers. It is unlikely that missionaries make much use of them now when engaged in breaking up fallow ground. They were written for those who were already endeavouring to walk in *The Way,* and for no one else. No one else is really concerned with them, nor in a position to express any opinion whatever about them.

These letters are for followers of *The Way* only, and to them their value is beyond dispute. Printing has now made them

[1] Especially amongst writers who use the novel as a vehicle for airing their religious opinions, and appear to believe that a satisfactory combination of Romance and Tract is possible.

readily accessible to all, but they are unlikely to prove very intelligible to those whose lives are not being lived against the supernatural background which they assume throughout. From such the Church does not expect—nor, we may add, particularly desire—appreciation of the oldest portion of its Scriptures.

The question of the date and authorship of the apostolic writings has been minutely investigated by many scholars in many different countries. Their conclusions are naturally not entirely unanimous, but it would be beside the point to attempt any discussion of them in detail here. It is enough to say that (with the exception of *Hebrews*) all the epistles which tradition has ascribed to S. Paul may be counted his. Nor is there any reasonable doubt about *1 Peter* or *James*. The authorship of *2 Peter*, *Jude*, and the three epistles which bear the name of *John* is, and will probably always remain, uncertain.

But for our present purpose this uncertainty is immaterial. They are Christian writings of the first century, and were composed within what may be called *the apostolic period*, whether the authors were apostles or not.[1] Therefore they too may be expected to throw some light upon the beliefs and practices of the Christians of that age. And that is the point which concerns us most at present.

What did the Christians of the first century believe, and how did they live? That is our question, and the first source to which we must turn for an answer is the apostolic letters, because the majority of them are the oldest Christian documents which we possess. We can neither go behind them nor turn aside from them. And if some are of later date than the Gospels they still belong to the formative, creative, period of the Church's history when the story of the Incarnate Life was still preserved (or had only just ceased to be preserved) in the living memory of eyewitnesses as well as in written records. Therefore they too must be taken into account—if for no other reason, because the Church has thought them worthy of a place in its Scriptures.

The light which the letters throw may not be as full as we are tempted to desire. But if the ray be narrow it is peculiarly

[1] This applies equally to *Hebrews*.

intense. And when we have ascertained as far as we can what the Christians of the first century believed, and how their faith affected their daily life, we shall be in a position to investigate two further points.

First : How did they come into possession of their beliefs ?

Secondly : Why did they hold them ?

III

THE OCCASIONS OF THE EPISTLES

THE apostolic letters, which constitute about one-third of the New Testament, are the object to which the student of the Christian religion ought to direct his attention first. The majority of them are older than any other portion of the Christian Scriptures,[1] and it is to them that we must look for light on the beliefs and practices of the first generation of Christians.

From the historical standpoint the evidence afforded by letters is, if less copious, more valuable than that which can be furnished by documents of any other kind; because it is largely indirect and in a sense involuntary. Letters show what was really in the mind of the writer and of his correspondent. They are not intended for those who have no other sources of information as to the matters with which they deal, nor are they composed with a view to the instruction of posterity.

Genuine letters are necessarily *occasional*. That is to say—they are prompted by some particular occurrence, which may be of a passing nature. This shapes their contents, and supplies the key to their meaning. If we know nothing about the occasion which produced any given letter we are likely to find a considerable part of it almost unintelligible. Particularly will this be the case with letters written more than eighteen centuries ago.

Most ordinary readers of the Bible have probably been conscious of this difficulty when they come to the Epistles of the New Testament. It is obvious that the author had some particular purpose in writing: but it is by no means equally obvious exactly what that was. And thus while certain isolated phrases stand out and stamp themselves upon the memory the general drift and point of the argument remains obscure. It may be clear enough to the small circle of professed scholars and students.

See Appendix A.

But it is probable that not one in a thousand of the ordinary congregations of our Churches could say in a few words what any one of the epistles is really about. It is to be feared that many of those who attend Public Worship understand very little of many of the New Testament lessons which they hear read.

It will therefore be worth while to set out briefly the particular occasions of the several epistles, so far as they can be ascertained. These will go far to account for any differences between them which may appear, other than those which are to be ascribed to the personality of the authors. When these differences have been noted it will be possible to estimate the element common to them all. This may prove to be large or small: for the moment its extent is a matter of indifference. But whether large or small it is to be counted of the greatest possible moment. For it will represent, beyond possibility of question, the beliefs and practices of the first generation of Christians. It may not—presumably, in view of the brevity of the epistles, it does not—include the whole of their beliefs: nor is it likely to furnish us with a complete picture of the life of any one Christian community. But what it does contain must possess an irrefragable claim upon our attention and upon our loyalty. And if we believe in a Divine Purpose manifesting itself in history, if we attach any weight to the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, we cannot but feel confident that the glimpses of early Christian life which the apostolic writings give us will enable us to apply ourselves with renewed energy and with good hope of success to the extremely difficult undertaking of leading a Christian life in the twentieth century.

1. *1 and 2 Thessalonians.*

Both these letters are written in the joint names of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. We read in *Acts* how the apostle had been driven from Thessalonica by the hostility of the Jews, who had represented him and his companions as being dangerous revolutionaries.[1] At first he probably hoped that he would be

[1] *Acts* 17$^{5-8}$.

able to return to Macedonia after a short interval. But the report brought to him at Corinth by Silas and Timothy [1] showed this to be impossible.

Jason, who had been S. Paul's host at Thessalonica, had been (in modern language) ' bound over to keep the peace ' ; [2] and would therefore be held responsible for any disturbances which might arise in connexion with the new religion. The hostility of the Jews was so persistent (this must have been part of the report brought by Silas and Timothy) that S. Paul's reappearance in Thessalonica would certainly lead to a violent outbreak. The consequences of this would fall upon Jason's head even more severely than upon the apostle himself, and the question of his revisiting Thessalonica was therefore at an end.

He was therefore compelled to write, in place of the personal visit which he had hoped to pay ; and his letters should probably be regarded as answers to a letter, or letters, which the Christians of Thessalonica had addressed to him.

S. Paul thanks God for the constancy of his new converts in the face of bitter and violent opposition ; a constancy which had extended their reputation far beyond their own borders.[3] This was the more creditable because his Jewish enemies had, beside their hostility to his teaching, circulated calumnies of a personal nature against himself. They had asserted that his motives were not pure, but that he was actuated by the hope of personal profit and advantage.[4] To refute these charges it was only necessary to appeal to his converts' recollection. His visit was not so remote that they would have any difficulty in recalling all the details, and there could be no question in their minds as to how he had comported himself among them.

But the most dangerous enemies of the infant Church of Thessalonica were to be found within its own borders. The belief was prevalent that the Second Coming of our Lord was imminent, and this was producing a very unsettling effect.[5] The Church of Thessalonica was troubled with fanatics who

1 *Acts* 17[5]. 2 Ib. 17[9]. *1 Thess.* 2[18]. 3 *1 Thess.* 1[7-9].

4 This is implied by *1 Thess.* 2[1-12].

5 The belief has been held at various periods of later Christian history and will doubtless reappear. It seems to appeal most to minds whose natural stability is not very great, and the effect is always bad.

had no respect for constituted authority, and despised all ordinary honest occupation on the ground that, as the end of the world was close at hand, these matters had ceased to be of any importance.[1] Besides the disturbance occasioned to the Church the conduct of these enthusiasts was in a fair way to become a public scandal.

It was the more difficult for S. Paul to allay this unwholesome excitement because at this period of his life he shared the belief from which it had sprung. He believed that the Second Advent would not be delayed for more than a few years, and that he himself would live to see it.[2] He could only emphasize the fact that it will be sudden and unexpected : [3] so that it is futile to scan the heavens for the first glimpse of its approach. He does not however think that it is *immediately* imminent.

Jewish tradition asserted that before Messiah appeared in power to take His kingdom [4] the forces of evil in the world would reach a climax. Their supremacy would appear to be complete and indisputable. Then, and not until then, Messiah would be revealed and would overthrow them finally in one stupendous battle. S. Paul accepts the tradition and contends that this point has clearly not yet been reached. Evil may be rampant : but it is not wholly unrestrained nor openly triumphant.[5] Therefore the Second Coming must be a matter of a few years rather than of a few days. The Church is living as it were under the shadow of an approaching catastrophe. But though this will be the greatest of all cataclysms, as it will be the last, anticipation of it must not be allowed to interrupt the orderly routine of normal life. It is easy for us, in whose minds the imminence of the Second Coming does not loom so large, to fail

[1] *1 Thess.* 4^{11}, ^{12}, 5^{12-14}. *2 Thess.* 3^{6-14}. [2] *1 Thess.* 4^{15-17}. [3] Ib. 5^{2}.

[4] This is how the Second Coming of our Lord was commonly regarded at this time. He was Messiah, but this fact was as yet known only to a few. Messiah had been revealed in Him in person but not in function. He had yet to reappear and to take His kingdom.

[5] *2 Thess.* 2^{1-10}. In *the man of sin* the apostle may or may not have had an historical character, such as the Emperor Nero, in mind. The restraining power is probably not any individual, but the good order maintained by the Roman Empire. The language is perhaps designedly vague : partly on account of the mysterious nature of the subject, and partly for fear lest it might come to the knowledge of those for whom it was not intended, and be twisted by them into treason.

to appreciate the strength and sanity of this counsel. The late war showed that it has not yet become obsolete.

2. *Galatians.*

Galatia was the name given to a large tract of country occupying the centre of what is now known to us as *Asia Minor*. Its exact boundaries are uncertain, but it seems to have extended nearly from the Black Sea on the north to the Mediterranean on the south. S. Paul had passed through the southern end of it on his first Missionary Journey, in company with Barnabas; and in spite of opposition from the Jews, especially at Iconium, their preaching had met with a considerable measure of success.[1]

After the Council of Jerusalem had decided that Gentiles who became Christians were not to be required to keep the Law of Moses,[2] S. Paul had revisited the Galatian Churches, to bring them the news which would be as great a relief to them as it had been to him.[3]

But the apostle's steps were dogged by unscrupulous opponents, and presently word was brought to him that the Galatians were being taught that he had misled them. There was but one way to Christianity, and that was via the Jewish faith, whose practices were as binding upon Christians as they had ever been upon any son of Abraham. To this teaching the Galatians lent too ready an ear; and it was supported by the pretence that it represented the real mind of the real apostles. S. Paul had not been one of the original Twelve: his authority therefore could not carry weight equal to theirs.

S. Paul saw at once how much was at stake. If the Jewish party carried the day it would mean first that Christianity could never fulfil its destiny as the final and universal religion. If the Jewish law were to remain an essential part of it, it could never appear in the eyes of the world at large as more than a reformed variety of Judaism. In this guise it could never hope to influence more than a comparatively small circle.

[1] *Acts* 14.

[2] Ib. 15. The question was bound to arise as soon as Christianity ceased to be confined to the small original circle of those who were either Jewish by blood, or had adopted the Jewish faith. And it was natural that opinion should at first be divided on the point.

[3] Ib. 15^{36}–16^{5}.

But this would not be the worst. The views of his opponents involved a fundamental misconception of the nature of Christ's work, and of the relationship which He has created between Himself and mankind.

At the back of the Jewish Law lay the idea of striking a bargain with God.[1] Certain things are prescribed which man is bound to observe. By observing them he establishes a claim upon God, which God for His part is bound to meet. Notions of this kind must in the long run prove fatal to the central belief of Christianity that—to put it shortly—our hope lies in the fact that God has of His own free will done far more for us than we could possibly have deserved. It is with this in mind that S. Paul contrasts sharply *faith in Christ* with *works of the law*,[2] and does not even hesitate to say *If ye receive circumcision Christ will profit you nothing*.[3]

The epistle to the Galatians was produced by the first great crisis through which the Church had to pass. It is enough to say that if S. Paul had been defeated the Gospel would have been transformed out of all recognition,[4] and the history of the world would have been entirely different.

A like question has arisen many times since in the Church's history, and will doubtless often arise again. From time to time it becomes necessary to decide whether some immemorial custom is or is not the only possible way of preserving and expressing some essential feature of the Christian Gospel. Such situations are necessarily fraught with difficulty and danger. But the problems which they present will always prove soluble if the Church which has to deal with them possess courage and insight sufficient to avail itself of the principle which was laid down by S. Paul in the argument which he addressed to the Churches of Galatia.[5]

1 This had not been intended originally. But this was the construction which Jewish teachers had come to put upon their sacred ordinances.

2 *Gal.* 2^{16}, 3^{11}. 3 Ib. 5^{2}.

4 As yet no written version of it existed, except possibly a collection of some of our Lord's sayings. It was preserved principally in living minds and the form which it finally assumed would therefore depend upon the view of it which they came to take.

5 The opinion that *Galatians* is the earliest of all St. Paul's epistles is gaining ground. See p. 157, *n.* 2.

3. *1 and 2 Corinthians.*

These two epistles probably present more difficulty than any of the others to the ordinary reader. This is not due so much to their actual contents (though the meaning of certain passages in them is admittedly obscure) as to the fact that they are part of a larger correspondence, the rest of which we do not possess. It seems probable that S. Paul wrote in all four letters to the Corinthians, and that they addressed at least two to him. S. Paul's first letter is, on this theory, not extant,[1] and both the Corinthian ones have disappeared. Our *2 Corinthians* is held by some to contain his third and fourth letters. If so they have got out of order. The third is from the beginning of Chapter 10 to the end of verse 10 of Chapter 13 : the fourth is the first nine chapters to which the last four verses of Chapter 13 originally belonged. How this transposition took place we cannot say. But such accidents were more likely to occur, and less likely to be detected afterwards, before the days of printing than they are now. It must, however, be admitted that this theory is unsupported by any manuscript evidence and presupposes a considerable degree of carelessness on the part of the Church. The principal argument which can be adduced in its favour is the abrupt change of tone at the beginning of Chapter 10. But it cannot be called more than a plausible conjecture.

The key to the whole correspondence lies in the circumstances in which the Corinthian Christians were placed. These were not originally and entirely of their own making.

Corinth was an important seaport, and, like all seaports all the world over, had gathered to itself a large and heterogeneous population. It lay upon a narrow isthmus across which ships were frequently dragged in order to avoid the long and dangerous voyage round the Peloponnesus. It was thus in a very special sense the gate between the East and the West ; much as Suez and Singapore are to-day. In early times the Phoenicians had established a post there, and Corinth was one of the very few

[1] Unless two fragments of it survive in our epistles *1 Cor.* 6^{12-20} and *2 Cor.* 6^{14}–7^{1}. cf. *The Life and Letters of S. Paul* by D. Smith, p. 236 (Hodder & Stoughton, 1919).

places on the soil of Europe (if not the only one) where prostitution had been raised, *more Asiatico,* to the rank of a religious cult.

The luxury and immorality of the city were a byword in a world which was not easily scandalized by any display of either. This was the atmosphere which the infant Church was compelled to breathe, and it was therefore a matter of peculiar difficulty for the new Christians to strip themselves of their old associations.

The pressure of these tended to force them into two opposing camps. On the one hand were those who held that matter is inherently evil and that the severest asceticism is the way to salvation. The flesh is to be mortified by every possible means, not as a method of strengthening the will, but because such mortification is in itself pleasing to God. This principle is extended to marriage, despite the fact that if it were universally adopted a century would witness the final disappearance of the human race from the earth.[1]

The ascetics at Corinth were probably only a small minority. More formidable and more numerous were those who had gone to the other extreme; who maintained that nothing done in or through the body can really affect the life of the soul.[2]

This theory (which is technically known as *antinomianism* because it rejects all moral restraints of every kind) seeks to justify itself by laying claim to spiritual enlightenment above the ordinary.[3] Those who are really spiritually minded, say its advocates, know that things done in the body do not touch the soul any more than a stain upon our clothing affects our characters.

Both these views have reappeared from time to time within the Church, and both are fundamentally incompatible with the central truth of the Gospel.[4]

1 *1 Cor.* 7^{1-5}, 8^{8}, 9^{4-8}. For the prevalence of similar views elsewhere cf. *1 Tim.* 4^{1-5}.

2 *1 Cor.* 6. The words *All things are lawful for me* and *Meats for the belly and the belly for meats,* and *God shall bring to naught both it and them* are quotations by S. Paul of the arguments employed by this party.

3 Ib. 2^{14}–3^{2}. The vigour with which S. Paul denies the Corinthians' claim to spirituality shows that it must have been pressed from their side.

4 It would be no matter for surprise if they should be adopted both by Theosophists and by the disciples of Mrs. Eddy to-day. But as far as I know this has not yet taken place.

If matter is inherently evil—not merely in so far as men have elected to make it so—then the Son of God could not have been manifested in human form, because the assumption of a body of flesh would *ipso facto* have defiled the Godhead.

On the other hand—if nothing done in the body can really affect our spiritual life, then the Incarnation becomes unnecessary and futile. It leaves us exactly where we were before, because the Word made Flesh can be and do nothing, from the standpoint of religion, which He could not have been and done equally well without becoming Incarnate.

Antinomianism also makes an end of conduct, because no action can be accounted either good or bad; and it was not long before its fruits appeared at Corinth. A member of the Church had been guilty of what judged even by pagan standards was an outrage upon morality.[1] And worst of all the Church, or at least a considerable section of it, appeared disposed to condone the offence.

This scandal, and the atmosphere which had made it possible, was the immediate occasion of the correspondence. But the situation was further complicated by the naturally contentious disposition of the Corinthians. Parties had sprung up within the Church, each claiming superiority over the others on the strength of the source from which it had received the Gospel. The rival claims of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas were being bandied to and fro,[2] and attempts had been made to disparage S. Paul's own authority, on the old ground that he had not been one of the original Twelve.[3]

Into this turmoil the Apostle had to try to reintroduce order. His first aim was to exorcize the spirit of factiousness[4] which was poisoning the life of the Church, and then to combat theories which, though not unnatural under the circumstances, were incompatible with Christianity and had already led to a frightful moral catastrophe.

He had also to secure that the arch-offender should be treated as he deserved and that the Church in general should realize that in all matters of conduct (not least where questions of

1 *1 Cor.* 5. 2 Ib. 1^{10-16}. 3 Ib., 9^{1-2}.
4 As S. Clement of Rome had to try to do some forty years later.

sex are concerned), the highest standard is universally obligatory and not impossible of attainment.

To do this he had to assert his own personal authority in the most uncompromising terms, and to maintain that morality is not a matter of fashion or expediency. It is permanent and unchanging, because it is nothing but the expression in terms of conduct of the relationship which God has made possible between Himself and mankind.[1]

4. *James.*

The epistle of S. James is addressed to *the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion.* It was therefore intended primarily for the Jewish colonies which were to be found in almost all the principal cities of the Gentile world. We see from *Acts* that these Jews were sometimes the most bitter and dangerous opponents of the Gospel. But sometimes they provided a soil in which the seed of the Word could find a lodging-place. And it is to these Jewish Christians, not to Jews who were still unconverted, that the epistle is addressed. It is naturally more Jewish in tone[2] than any other book of the New Testament, but its implications show plainly that it was intended for Christian readers.[3]

There is no reasonable room for doubt that the author is the man who was known as *James the Lord's brother*[4] or as *James the Just.* The exact nature of the relationship between him and our Lord is uncertain, but it is clear that he was not one of the original Twelve.[5] The apocryphal *Gospel according to the Hebrews* preserves a tradition of an appearance of our Lord to him after His resurrection to which his conversion was due.[6] He became what may be called first Bishop of Jerusalem, and as such presided over the Council recorded in the fifteenth chapter of *Acts.* He was murdered in or about the year 62 at the instigation of the Sadducees.

1 e.g. *1 Cor.* 6^{19-20}. *2 Cor.* 4^{10-12}. 2 2^{2}, 2^{21-25}; 5^{5}; 5^{10-11}; 5^{17}.

3 1^{1}; 2^{1}; 5^{8}. These passages would be unintelligible to any one who was unacquainted with Christian teaching. The idea of the Church as the New Israel was prominent in the earliest days, and some have therefore held that the address of *James* and *1 Peter* does not necessarily mean that they had readers of Jewish blood primarily in view.

4 *Gal.* 1^{19}. 5 *S. John* 7^{5}. 6 cf. *1 Cor.* 15^{7}.

This last fact shows that his epistle must be among the earliest Christian documents which we possess,[1] and this idea is confirmed by the absence of controversial matter from its contents. It may belong to a date some years before the one which has been assigned to it here.[2]

James the Just provided in his own person a unique link between the old and the new orders. He was a leader amongst the Christians, and was at the same time a saint in the eyes of the Jews. As long as he was alive the final breach between the Law and the Gospel was bound to be delayed, and part of his motive in writing the epistle may have been to preserve and strengthen the tie between them.

The most noteworthy feature of the book is the emphasis laid upon the necessity of *works*, and upon the futility of *faith* without them.[3]

Attempts have been made to twist this into a deliberate attack upon the teaching of S. Paul. But those who hold that the two are at variance do not seem to have realized that they are attacking two completely different errors. S. Paul, the deeply-rooted notion that man can enter into a contract with God and thereby earn, as a right, salvation by the punctilious discharge of his own side of the bargain. On this theory—when man has done his part God must do His.

S. James has before him the idea that intellectual orthodoxy of a somewhat formal kind, which does not really influence life, is the sum of religion.

There will never be a Church which does not from time to time need to be reminded of this. The warning may well have been particularly required by Jews who had become Christians: that is to say by Jews who had in theory accepted Christ as the Redeemer of Israel, but still walked in the ways of their fathers and had not fully realized how much the acceptance really meant, nor how completely it was bound to transform their lives.

[1] For an elaborate dissertation on the personality of the author and the date of the epistle see *The Epistle of S. James* by Joseph B. Mayor, pp. 1–151 (Macmillan, 1892). Also Professor R. J. Knowling's edition in *The Westminster Commentaries* series, pp. 11–80 (Methuen, 1904).

[2] See Appendix A.

[3] 2^{1-14}.

5. *Romans.*

The Epistle to the Romans is in reality an encyclical letter. That is to say—it was not intended for any particular Church to the exclusion of all others, but was meant to be circulated throughout the whole Christian world. As each copy was completed the name of the place to which it was to be sent could be inserted in verse 7 of Chapter 1. *To all you who are at* [Rome] *God's beloved and by calling saints.* To certain copies S. Paul would naturally add personal greetings appropriate to the place in question: but these are not strictly part of the epistle. The pre-eminence of Rome as the Capital of the World has led to the epistle becoming generally known as *To the Romans*, though it was not written for them more than for other Churches.[1]

The epistle proper comes to an end with Chapter 14, to which the doxology (16 $^{25-27}$) was originally attached. The intervening portion (15–16^{23}) contains the personal salutations. It is possible that some of these were originally intended for the Church of Ephesus.[2] But Bishop Lightfoot, in his note on *Caesar's Household*, has shown that a large proportion of the names are those of actual members of the imperial household at this time.[3]

This epistle is therefore less *occasional* than many of the others. But we can detect in it traces of the controversy which had produced *Galatians*. At Rome also there was a Judaizing party who held that the ancient privileges of the Chosen People had not been abrogated by the Gospel, and that the Law was the only gateway by which men could enter into the Church of Christ.[4]

There is nothing in this which need surprise us. There had for a long time been a considerable Jewish colony at Rome, beside a large mixed Oriental population. It was amongst these immigrants that the Gospel struck root first;[5] and if virtually

1 It is possible that the Christian community at Rome was large enough to need more than one *Roman* copy.

2 For a full discussion of the point see *The Earlier Epistles of S. Paul* by Kirsopp Lake, pp. 325–420 (Rivingtons, 1911). Ephesus and Rome were the *foci* of the Christian world.

3 *Epistle to the Philippians*, pp. 169–76. 4 *Rom.* 7–11.

5 It appears to have made no headway amongst the native population for the best part of a century. For the first hundred years of its existence the Roman Church used no language but Greek. Traces of this survive in its practice at the present day.

all the first Christians at Rome were either men who were Jews by race and religion, or men who were more or less familiar with Jewish claims, it was almost inevitable that controversy as to the position of the sons of Abraham in the new Israel should arise before very long.

But S. Paul is not now concerned primarily with confuting a particular set of opponents by meeting their contentions point by point. His object is rather to cut the ground from under their feet for good and all by setting out what manner of thing he conceives Christianity to be. Once the true nature of the Christian religion has been grasped it will become obvious that there is no *locus standi* remaining for his adversaries.

Accordingly he begins by laying down that salvation is universal, and that it is by faith. No set of people can claim any inherent property in it to the exclusion of any other, because it is the gift of God which He offers to all mankind on equal terms.[1] And it can only be grasped as a gift. It cannot be discovered by men, nor can it be earned by them.

In support of this contention he calls attention to the complete and obvious moral failure of the Gentile world. The Gentiles had received a real revelation of God in the realm of Nature. But they had not used it as they ought and had gone from bad to worse. Sombre as S. Paul's picture is we know enough from other sources to be assured that it is not overdrawn.[2] The Gentile world has failed disastrously: of that there can be no question. And the catastrophe which has overtaken the Jews is no less complete and admits of less excuse. The Jews ought to have done better, because the revelation of God which had been vouchsafed to them was much fuller than anything which had come within the horizon of the Gentiles. But they too have failed; no less signally, if not in the same way. The root of their failure has been inability to understand their own history.[3]

The reader who has followed S. Paul to this point has now been brought to the verge of the conclusion that it is impossible for man to approach God. The avenues which have been tried have led nowhere—or away from Him. But now the apostle

1 *Rom.* 1^{14-17}. 2 Ib. 1^{18}–2^{16}. 3 Ib. 2^{17}–4^{25}.

goes on to show that God has by His own act opened a new way of approach for all. Men could never have found it for themselves nor could they have forced it. But it exists because the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have made it possible for men to die to their sins and to rise again to the life of the Spirit. The salvation which had eluded the search of Jewish legalists and heathen philosophers alike has now been placed by God within human reach.[1] And the same Divine Justice which has so terribly scourged sin will restore Israel to its place in the Divine Economy as soon as a change of heart has made this possible.[2]

Romans may be regarded as the First Commentary upon the Gospel. It is the first attempt which was ever made to show, in systematic fashion, the world-wide significance of the Divine Life, and Its place in human history.

S. Paul did not imagine that what he was writing would be raised by common consent to the rank of Scripture, and so become part of the permanent treasure of the Church. But his uncompromising recognition of the facts of human history, his overwhelming sense of the Divine Justice, his massive argument, and spiritual elevation have laid a foundation which no one who ventures to handle the same theme [3] will ever be able to ignore.

6. *Philippians.*

There is an interval of nearly four years [4] between the writing of *Romans* and of *Philippians*, and the period had been a very eventful one in the apostle's life. It had contained his last visit to Jerusalem and the attack made upon him by the Jews there: his arrest, his trial and imprisonment at Caesarea, his appeal to Caesar, his voyage and shipwreck.[5] Now he is a prisoner at Rome; awaiting his trial and preaching the Gospel there with more success than might have been expected in view of his circumstances.[6] His ambition of *seeing Rome* has been realized: though not under such conditions as he would have chosen.

1 *Rom.* 5^{1}–8^{39}. 2 Ib. 9^{1}–11^{36}.
3 i.e. The significance of the Divine Life, and Its place in history.
4 See Appendix A. 5 *Acts* 20^{1}–28^{16}. 6 *Phil.* $1^{12\text{-}14}$.

The immediate occasion of the letter was a visit from Epaphroditus, who had come from Philippi with a supply of money for the relief of S. Paul's necessities.[1] His return had been delayed by a dangerous illness.[2]

The greater part of the letter is therefore naturally occupied with the outpouring of the apostle's thanks to the Christians of Philippi for their timely gift, which has not only relieved his physical wants but has also been a source of much encouragement and consolation to him.

Beside the hostility of his avowed enemies, who have made him a prisoner, he has had to contend with opposition within the Church itself.[3] This appears to have been principally of a ' Judaizing ' character, and to have had its centre in the old question with which he had already been compelled to deal more than once—*Is it necessary to become a Jew before you can become a Christian ?* [4]

Epaphroditus had also brought news of a dispute at Philippi which had arisen between two women named Euodia and Syntyche. Nothing more is known of either of them.[5]

7. *Ephesians.*

What is known to us as *The Epistle to the Ephesians* is in reality an encyclical intended for all the Churches of Asia. It is addressed *To the Saints which are at* —, so that the name of any particular community could be inserted. By a not unnatural accident the name of *Ephesus* has become permanently attached to it, just as the name of Rome has been appropriated to the earlier encyclical *On the Nature of the Christian Religion.*

Ephesians was sent from Rome by the hand of Tychicus,[6] and may have been to some extent occasioned by intelligence which he had brought from Asia to S. Paul.

Some five years before the apostle had warned the elders of the Church of Ephesus of the probable appearance of *grievous wolves,* and of *men speaking perverse things* who should work havoc amongst them.[7] If these forebodings were realized it was

1 *Phil.* 2^{25}; 4^{14-18}. 2 Ib. 2^{21-27}. 3 Ib. 1^{15-18}. 4 Ib. 3^{2}–4^{1}.
5 Ib. 4^{2-3}. 6 *Eph.* 6^{21}. 7 *Acts* 20^{29-30}.

unlikely that the mischief would be confined to Ephesus itself. The whole of western Asia [1] would be liable to infection.

The character of the opinions which S. Paul wished to combat appears more clearly in *Colossians*, which was written at the same time and dispatched by the same hand.

Briefly, they were of the nature of what came to be known afterwards as *Gnosticism*, to which the nearest modern equivalent is Theosophy.

It would be out of place to attempt any discussion of the innumerable and fantastic ramifications of Gnosticism here. It will be enough to say that the Gnostic system (in so far as it can be regarded as a single system) consisted of a foundation of Oriental philosophy into which varying amounts of Greek, or Jewish, or Christian ideas were introduced. Its one consistent principle was the inherently evil character of Matter which lies at the root of Buddhism to-day. This raised (*inter alia*) the question, What is the relationship between God and the world?

If He created the world, then as the world is inherently evil beyond redemption, it follows that He must be accounted the Author of Evil. Or if we shrink from a conclusion so desperate, we seem to be compelled to assume that the persistence of evil in the world is due either to His negligence or to His incapacity. In any case the only solution of the problem (which without postulating the inherent evil of Matter is a very real and serious one) seems to lie in placing God at a vast distance from the world. Between Him and us there is set a vast hierarchy of spiritual beings of whom our Lord was merely one. To some of these, belonging to the lower ranks, the creation and administration of the world has been entrusted. They have not discharged their task very well: hence the confusion and misery of which we cannot but be conscious. Possibly at some future time the High God may intervene to mend the work of His unskilful agents.

Views of this kind reappear from time to time. Something not very far from them is at the present day part of the stock-in-trade of more than one popular novelist and preacher. Their

[1] Using the word in the classical sense to signify the western part of what is known to us as *Asia Minor*.

advantage is that they furnish a simple and superficially satisfactory theory of evil which is much easier of acceptance than anything which Christianity can recognize as true. They are sometimes presented in a Christian dress, and are sincerely urged as the interpretation of the Gospel most appropriate to these times. But they are in reality wholly incompatible with it. They can only co-exist with Christianity in minds which have never thought out the implications of either.

S. Paul meets these speculations with a constructive statement of God's purpose for the world and the method of its accomplishment which carries him far beyond the immediate requirements of any particular controversy. It is, and always has been, God's design to knit the human race together into a perfect unity.[1] The Incarnation has revealed His will, so that it is now possible for men to co-operate consciously with Him.[2] The instrument by means of which the Divine Purpose is being made effective in the world, through Christ, is the Church.[3] Thus the Church is much more than a mere human association created by men for convenience' sake, comparable with associations of other kinds which men have brought into being for the furtherance of particular purposes. Neither is its function merely to preserve a memory. It is a Divine Creation, the organ of God's activity in the world. Its relationship to Christ is so close and intimate that it is to be regarded as His Body.

It is to be at once the pattern of the world-wide all-embracing unity which God has planned as the final goal of our race, and the means whereby the Divine Conception is to be translated into fact in human life.

From this conception of the Church (which is in fact the interpretation of the Gospel most urgently needed in these times) three obvious conclusions follow.

1. We cannot despair of the world. If God is working out a purpose in it it cannot be inherently evil beyond redemption. Neither can it be an illusion as Hinduism appears to hold. It is rather to be regarded as a theatre of Divine Activity wherein we are called to co-operate with God. The highest moral triumphs are therefore possible in it.

[1] *Eph.* $1^{4, 10, 11}$; $2^{5-10, 13-22}$. [2] Ib. 3^{9-12}. [3] Ib. 4^{11-16}; 5^{22-33}.

2. God has never abandoned the world, nor entrusted it to agents of limited capacity. His connexion with it has never been interrupted and is as intimate as anything which we can conceive. He is no remote potentate, but an ever-present Saviour.

3. The divisions between man and man, between class and class, between nation and nation, are not insuperable.[1] By union with Christ it is possible to realize a unity which shall comprehend and transcend them all.

This encyclical *On the Church* forms a natural corollary to the earlier encyclical *On the Nature of the Christian Religion*,[2] and is the fullest single expression of S. Paul's mind which we possess. Perhaps the world has never had more need to assimilate it than it has to-day.[3] Certainly if the teaching of *Ephesians* had been more thoroughly grasped and had been made the foundation of European civilization the *League of Nations* would not be required now. Probably no other set of ideas will ever succeed in making the League an effective force.

8. *Colossians.*

Colossae lay almost due east of Ephesus on the River Lycus. Once it had been a place of considerable importance, but in recent times had been somewhat eclipsed by the rise of Laodicea and Hierapolis.[4] The whole district contained a large Jewish population, whose influence had made itself felt in the Church.

The Colossians and their neighbours were being attracted by speculations similar to those which had appeared at Ephesus. They too were disposed to set God at a vast distance from the world, and to people the intervening space with an hierarchy of spiritual beings—of whom Christ was only one. But their Theosophy had assumed a more definitely Jewish complexion, and was inculcating first a rigorous ascetism [5] (after the manner of the Essenes) and secondly an over-scrupulous observance of holy-days and other minute regulations.[6]

1 In S. Paul's world these were deeper and wider than they are in any part of Europe now.

2 *Romans.*

3 For a full discussion of this point see *S. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* by J. Armitage Robinson, pp. 78–89 (Macmillan, 1903).

4 cf. *Col.* 4^{13}, ^{16}.

5 Ib. 2^{20-23}.

6 Ib. 2^{16-17}.

It was therefore necessary for S. Paul to emphasize the uniqueness of Christ's Person and the all-sufficient, all-embracing character of His Work.[1] He has brought men into the closest personal relationship with Himself, so that no angelic intermediaries between man and God are required.[2]

The parallels between *Colossians* and *Ephesians* are close and obvious. Both are directed against theories which are not dead yet. They are superficially plausible and appeal strongly to minds of a certain type. But they would ultimately pare away the significance of the Incarnation. Both epistles emphasize the uniqueness of Christ in Himself, and His ever-present activity in the world.

9. *Philemon.*

The bearer of *Colossians* was Tychicus, and he was accompanied by Onesimus, who is described as *a faithful and beloved brother who is one of you.*[3] From the short letter to Philemon we learn that Onesimus was his slave. He had run away from his master and had taken refuge at Rome. There he had come into contact with S. Paul and had become a Christian. Now the apostle returns him to his old master, himself a Christian, in the hope that he will henceforth treat him as a brother rather than as a slave.

It is noteworthy that S. Paul does not question Philemon's right to own a slave. In that world slavery played the part which is played by credit in our own: that is to say it was regarded as the only possible foundation of civilized life. A Christian master might be expected to treat his slaves better than a heathen one would be likely to do. But the time was still far in the future when the Christian conscience would perceive that slavery, however mitigated by considerate treatment, is indefensible in principle and incompatible with the Gospel, inasmuch as it involves a relationship which ought never to exist between two children of God.

10. *1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy.*

These three letters, which are known collectively as *The*

[1] *Col.* 1^{15-23}; 2^{2}, 3, $9-11$. [2] Ib. 2^{12-16}; 3^{1-4}. [3] Ib. 49.

Pastoral Epistles, may conveniently be taken together.[1] They belong to the last phase of S. Paul's ministry, about which we know nothing beyond what can be gathered from them.

The close of *Acts* has left him a prisoner at Rome awaiting his trial. Now he is at liberty ;[2] and we must therefore conclude that he has been brought to trial and acquitted. This is what we should have expected, as Roman justice was good, and he had not been guilty of any legal offence. We may perhaps presume that the first use which he made of his freedom was to visit Spain, and possibly Gaul. But of this journey no record survives.

It appears from these epistles that he revisited Ephesus, and also paid a visit to the island of Crete, which he had seen during his voyage to Rome some years before.[3] He had left Timothy in charge of the Church at Ephesus, which was probably already fully organized, and Titus to build up the organization of the younger Christian community in Crete.

It would be beside our present point to discuss how closely the position occupied by Timothy and Titus corresponded with what we mean by *the office and work of a Bishop*.[4] We do not know whether their commission was permanent, or whether they were merely S. Paul's lieutenants, to represent him until he should be able to return.

But however that might be, both Timothy and Titus were confronted with difficult tasks. Theosophy was still rife at Ephesus, and there was danger lest the true tradition of Christ's Person and teaching should be obscured or explained away by fantastic and unedifying speculations.[5]

The Cretans had a bad name for turbulence and general immorality, so that Titus was more likely to have to contend with ethical than with intellectual problems.[6]

Both Timothy and Titus were young for such heavy responsi-

[1] Some scholars hold that they are not by the hand of S. Paul but merely embody a certain amount of his teaching. I have treated them as his. But the evidence against this view is not negligible (see *The Pastoral Epistles*, by R. St. J. Parry, Cambridge University Press 1920).

[2] *1 Tim.* 1^3, 3^{14}, 4^{13}. [3] *Acts* 27^{7-14}.

[4] The words translated *Bishop* and *Elder* in our Bibles are in the New Testament interchangeable. The latter has now become *Priest*, but *Bishop* and *Priest* are not distinct Orders during the apostolic period.

[5] *1 Tim.* 1^4, 4^{1-8}, 6^{3-6}, *2 Tim.* 3^{1-10}. [6] 1^{10-16}, 3^{9-11}.

bilities, and the Apostle was naturally anxious as to how they would acquit themselves. Necessarily a considerable portion of all three letters is occupied with details of ecclesiastical administration; a fact which has led to suspicion as to their genuine character.

There is no clue as to the place from which the first two were written. The mention of Nicopolis [1] is no help, as there were eight places of the name.

When *2 Timothy* was written the apostle appears to have been back at Rome, and to have been arrested once more.[2] Of the cause or circumstances of this arrest we know nothing. But it seems to have produced a panic amongst the Christians at Rome. For the moment he has been remanded: but he is well aware that the respite will only be brief, and that the end cannot be long delayed. *The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will bring me safe to His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever Amen.*

A few months, perhaps a few weeks, after he had penned these words, the Apostle of the Gentiles received the crown of martyrdom outside the walls of Rome.[3]

II. *Hebrews.*

The epistle *To the Hebrews* is approximately contemporary with the Pastoral Epistles. Probably it is a little earlier than *2 Timothy*. The author is unknown, but a variety of considerations make it certain that he was not S. Paul. Several names have been suggested, of which Apollos is the most plausible and attractive. But any attempt to fix the authorship can be no more than a conjecture.

In the first days of the Church a considerable number of Jews had embraced Christianity without abandoning the religion in which they had been brought up. Their position was in reality somewhat anomalous, but it was not felt to be impossible; and for about a generation a living link between the old and

1 *Titus* 3^{12}. 2 *2 Tim.* $1^{15\text{-}17}$, $4^{16\text{-}17}$.

3 The spot is shown to-day under the title of *Tre Fontane*. There is no reason for doubting its genuineness.

the new orders existed in the person of James the Just. His murder in A.D. 62 accentuated the already growing tension, and the obvious intention of the Zealots to force a duel with Rome precipitated the crisis.

By the year 66 Hebrew Christians (or if not all of them those at least who lived in and near Jerusalem) had been brought to the parting of the ways. They had now to choose definitely and finally between the Law and the Gospel. The decision was not an easy one, and *Hebrews* is addressed to those who were still hesitating as to the course which they ought to take. Two attitudes towards the Mosaic Law, either of which would justify its abandonment, were obviously possible.

1. It might be rejected summarily as something with which no Christian could have any concern, because it belonged to an order which was dead and buried. If this view were taken it might easily be pushed to the length of asserting that not only had the Law made no contribution to Christianity, but that it was necessarily definitely hostile to it.[1]

But what devout Jew could be expected to accept this? For it would strip his national history of all spiritual significance. On this theory the Promise made to Abraham becomes a dream, the Choice of Israel a figment of the imagination, the Tabernacle and Temple merely centres of superstition. The Scriptures which he had been brought up to revere, which were continually upon our Lord's lips, are emptied of at least nine-tenths of their significance.

If the Law and all that went with it had no meaning whatever for a Christian, what manner of God could He be of whom it was held to be a revelation? Could we maintain that it had been a revelation of God at all? If not, have not the very foundations of the Gospel been shaken?

2. It might be held that the system of the Law was an elaborate and complicated allegory.

[1] Marcion, a prominent heresiarch of the second century, appears to have taken this view of all the Old Testament. In his eyes the God of the Jews seems to have been virtually indistinguishable from what we should call the Devil. Probably the idea that the Old Testament records a progressive revelation had never crossed his mind, and he was perplexed by the low ethical standard of certain portions of it. The difficulty seems to be real to some people to-day.

This is, in fact, the line taken by the *Epistle of Barnabas*, a work which may belong to the first century, and cannot be later than the very early years of the second.

According to Barnabas the ordinances of the Law were never of any value in themselves, but were meant to be interpreted in a spiritual (i.e. an allegorical) way. Such a view would have seemed easier of acceptance to a Jew than it does to us, as it is in line with one school of Jewish interpretation of the Scriptures.[1] But it is exposed to grave objections. Virtually it amounts to explaining the Old Testament away. It is difficult to believe that God could rightly be said to have ordained what was avowedly of no value whatever in itself: particularly as on this theory the entire Hebrew nation had completely misunderstood the nature of their religion from the very beginning, and had never drawn from it any of the lessons which God had intended. Make-believe may have a part to play in religion. But it cannot be the whole of it.

Hebrews does not take either of these views. The Law was a real revelation of God, and meant what it appeared to mean.[2] At the time when it was given nothing else could have taken its place. But God has never been confined within its limits.[3] Also, it is by its very nature transitory. It raised hopes and pointed to possibilities which it had in itself no power to fulfil. Unless it is understood to look forward to something which is not itself, it is unintelligible and futile.[4] Now its goal has been revealed in the Person of Christ.[5]

Therefore the work of the law is now done. It is not to be discarded contemptuously, but to be laid aside reverently, as an instrument which has discharged its divinely appointed function and has prepared the way for something better.[6]

Perhaps no Church has ever had to submit its faith to a severer test than that which this Christian community had to meet. But in all times of change, when ancient landmarks are being uprooted, and men's hearts are failing them for fear and for

[1] Which just appears in the New Testament, e.g. *1 Cor.* 10^4, *Gal.* 4^{21-31}; and perhaps *S. Matt.* 12^{40}.

[2] *Heb.* 1^1, 35, 5^{1-4}, 9^{18-23}. [3] Ib. 6^{13}, 7^{1-23}. [4] Ib. 7^{11-24}, 8^8–9^{10}, 10^{1-5}.

[5] Ib. 1^{2-4}, 2^{9-11}, 4^{14-16}, 9^{11-15}, $^{23-28}$. [6] Ib. 12^{12}, 13, 27, 28.

looking after those things which are coming on the earth, the Church will turn with renewed gratitude to the unknown author of *Hebrews*.

12. *1 S. Peter.*

This letter is addressed to *the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.*[1] The natural inference is that it was intended for Christian Jews residing in various parts of what is now known to us as *Asia Minor* : and this idea is further attested by its contents.[2]

It was dispatched by the hand of Silvanus, who is presumably identical with the person whose name is coupled by S. Paul with that of Timothy in *1* and *2 Thessalonians* and in *2 Corinthians* 1^{19}. The reference to *Mark* and to *Babylon* at the close[3] leaves virtually no room for doubt that the place of writing was Rome.[4]

The letter is principally an exhortation to courage, patience, and perseverance in the face of a severe persecution which is to be anticipated.[5] It is written under a strong sense of impending calamity.[6] The exact ground of the Apostle's forebodings is uncertain. But the following conjecture may perhaps be regarded as plausible.

If, as is probable, the epistle was written from Rome during the year 68, S. Paul had been put to death during the previous year. The growing unpopularity of the Christians (to which an impetus had been given by their supposed complicity in the Great Fire of Rome in 64) would almost certainly impel the government to seek fresh victims. S. Peter must have known that his own life, as one of the principal members of the Christian community, was very insecure. And it was not unlikely that instructions had been sent to provincial governors to take measures against this new and undesirable sect. In any case the possibility that they would be sent had to be faced.

Moreover the First Jewish War was now in progress, and the

[1] Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia are mentioned in the account of the Day of Pentecost. *Acts* 2^{10}. See also p. 72, *n.* 3.

[2] *1 Pet.* 1^{10-12}, 2^{12}, 3^{6}, ^{20}. The mention of *Gentiles* assumes Jewish readers, and the other three allusions would be much more readily intelligible in Jewish circles.

[3] Ib. 5^{13}.

[4] cf. *Apoc.* 17, 18.

[5] *1 Peter* 1^{6}, 7, 4^{12-19}, 5^{6-10}.

[6] Ib. 47.

subjugation of Palestine was proving more difficult than had been expected. Every Jew was therefore a potential rebel in the eyes of the Roman Government. The Jews of Asia would naturally be regarded as more dangerous than those of Europe because their situation made it easier for them to help their fellow-countrymen, either by sending them supplies or by raising trouble in the rear of the Roman armies.

The Christian Jews to whom S. Peter wrote were therefore liable to be attacked by the government for two reasons. First because they were Christians, and as such adherents of an unpopular, if not in the strict sense of the word unlawful, religion: secondly because they were Jews, and as such members of a rebellious and troublesome nation.

They might also be exposed to unofficial persecution at the hands of fellow-Jews for their loyalty to the Roman Government, which in Jewish eyes stamped them as unpatriotic renegades.[1] Their position was thus one of peculiar difficulty and might well be described as *a fiery trial*; which they could do nothing to avert.

The genuineness of the epistle has been impugned on the ground that the condition of affairs which it implies did not arise until between the years 75–80, by which time S. Peter was dead.[2] But our knowledge is insufficient to assert this positively, and any difficulty which may be felt in the way of ascribing it to the Apostle is outweighed by its contents. *1 Peter* reveals beyond any reasonable doubt a further development of the mind and character of the S. Peter of the Gospels and of *Acts*. It is more difficult to attribute it to any other author than to accept the unvarying tradition of the Church which has assigned it to him.

13. *2 S. Peter.*

It is probable that an interval of not less than twenty-five years separates this epistle from *1 Peter*. Obvious marks of late

[1] The vigorous exhortation to loyalty (2$^{11-17}$) perhaps indicates how difficult Christian Jews found it to look on while the nation was engaged in a life and death struggle, and the armies of Rome were advancing against the Holy City.

[2] cf. Sir W. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, pp. 285 et sqq. (Hodder & Stoughton 1893). There is no reason to doubt the tradition that S. Peter was martyred not very long after S. Paul.

date are the reference to the lapse of time since *the fathers fell asleep* [1] (by which must be meant the fathers of the Christian Church, not the Patriarchs of the Old Testament), and the disappointment which was felt because the Second Coming of Christ was not yet. Also the fact that the letters of S. Paul have become a recognized authority in the Church.[2] These considerations alone make it virtually impossible to hold that the epistle is in reality the work of the apostle whose name it bears. And to them must be added the fact that the style and language are very unlike that of *1 Peter*, but bear a close resemblance to *Jude*.[3]

But this does not mean that the epistle is merely what we should call a forgery. In making use of S. Peter's name the author was following a conventional custom of respectable antiquity. The practice of attaching great names to works produced long after the bearers of them were dead, was quite common in the Jewish world, and was not regarded as in any way dishonest.[4] The writer of this letter wished to say what he thought S. Peter would be likely to say if he were still alive, and was merely following a well-established literary convention by writing in S. Peter's name. This view of what is legitimate in the way of assuming a character might justify in his eyes, if not in ours, his assertion that he was present at the Transfiguration.

The epistle is addressed *To them which have obtained a like precious faith with us*, and must therefore have been intended for any Christian readers into whose hands it might come. There is no clue to the place of writing. The occasion is the intrusion of false teachers into the Church, in whom doctrinal error is combined with dissolute life.[5]

We do not know precisely who these teachers were nor what they held. But from the emphasis laid in the opening chapter on *knowledge*, upon the open, simple character of the apostolic

1 *2 Peter* 3[4]. 2 *2 Peter* 3[15-17].

3 This point is worked out at length in the introduction of *The Epistle of S. Jude and the Second Epistle of S. Peter*, by J. B. Mayor (Macmillan, 1907).

4 e.g. *The Wisdom of Solomon* (about 150 B.C.). *The Book of Enoch* (from about 160 B.C.). *The Psalms of Solomon* (about 45 B.C.).

5 *2 Peter* 2[1-4].

teaching, and upon the testimony of old time prophecy (which does not admit of private interpretation), it seems probable that the offenders were early representatives of those who during the second century became known as *Gnostics*. Forerunners of them had appeared at Ephesus and at Colossae some thirty years before.

The word *Gnostic* means *possessing knowledge*, and those to whom it is applied in Christian history were sectaries who (*inter alia*) laid claim to the possession of special secret knowledge which was not to be found in the recognized Christian Scriptures nor in the public, common tradition of the Church. This naturally placed them upon a unique spiritual eminence whence they could look down with befitting contempt upon the less enlightened herd. And their spiritual superiority entitled them to disregard, if they thought fit, the ordinary moral law.[1] A similar esoteric claim is made by Theosophy, which is the heir of Gnosticism in our world to day. It is naturally an attractive one, but apart from any effect which it may have upon morals the Church can make no terms with it.

14. *Jude.*

What has been written above about *2 Peter* applies equally to *Jude*. The author describes himself as *brother of James*,[2] but as he appears to dissociate himself from *the apostles* [3] it is to be presumed that he wished to be taken for Jude *the Lord's brother*.[4]

As we do not know for certain in what relation the Lord's brethren stood to Him we cannot say positively that one of them could not have survived until near the close of the first century, which is the earliest date which can be assigned to this epistle. But unless they were considerably younger than He it is unlikely that any one of them lived so long. It is therefore probable that the author of *Jude* has followed the literary convention of concealing his own name.

The epistle, like *2 Peter*, is directed against false teachers of licentious life, upon whom the judgement of God will assuredly fall. A noteworthy feature is its use of books which have never been included in the canonical Scriptures. There is a reference

[1] See above on *Corinthians*, *Ephesians*, and *Colossians*.
[2] v. 1. [3] v. 17. [4] *S. Matt.* 1355.

to the *Assumption of Moses*,[1] to *Enoch*,[2] and perhaps to the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*.[3]

There is no clue to the place of writing, and the letter seems to be addressed to the Christian world in general.

2 Peter and Jude, if not by the same hand, can hardly be counted independent works. Their authors must have belonged to the same circle; which may very well be the one which produced other works bearing the name of *Peter*[4] at the close of the first, or very early in the second century.

15. *2 and 3 John.*

It would be out of place to attempt here even the briefest general discussion of the problems connected with the five books which bear the name of *John*. Opinion is divided as to whether these two little letters are by the same hand as *1 John* or not. It has been thought that the author's description of himself as *The Elder* is meant to mark a distinction. Certainty on the point will perhaps never be within our reach. But the evidence for the existence of John the Elder as a distinct personage is very flimsy. Both appear to have been originally private communications, and the author hopes to visit his correspondents shortly.

2 John is addressed to *The Elect Lady* or *To the Lady Eclecta*,[5] and closes with a greeting from the children of her sister. No satisfactory explanation of this has yet been found. We cannot even be certain whether an individual or a community is intended. The main purpose of the letter is to warn the recipient against *deceivers who confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh*. This is in itself an indication of a comparatively late date when attempts were being made to explain the Incarnation away. The general tone is that of an old man writing with authority.

1 v. 9. 2 v. 14.

3 v. 6. In this connexion it is of interest to note that *1 Cor.* 2[9] is said by many early writers to be a quotation from the *Revelation of Elijah*. It may, however, be a loose quotation of *Isa.* 64[4].

4 A *Gospel*, *Acts*, *Revelation*, and *Preaching of Peter*. Considerable fragments of them exist. An account of the *Gospel* and *Revelation* by J. A. Robinson and M. R. James was published by the Cambridge University Press in 1892. A more popular account of the Gospel by J. Rendel Harris was published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1893.

5 If *Eclecta* is a personal name it is a very unusual one.

The same note is even more conspicuous in *3 John*, which is addressed to *Gaius*[1] *the beloved*. We know nothing of this *Gaius* beyond what can be gathered from this letter, from which it appears that he had been generous of his hospitality towards strangers. The author has met with opposition from *Diotrephes* (who is nothing but a name to us), which he hopes to crush by means of a personal visit. An equally unknown *Demetrius* is mentioned with commendation.

Brief though they are, these two letters give us an interesting, if somewhat tantalizing, glimpse of Church life at the close of the apostolic age, and we should have missed something if they had not been included in the Scriptures.

16. *1 John.*

There can be no doubt that this epistle is by the same hand as the Fourth Gospel, whether that hand belonged to John the son of Zebedee, or (as is on the whole more probable) to a younger namesake.[2]

Whoever he may have been, Christian tradition asserts that he was the last survivor of those who had seen the Lord during the days of His Flesh, and he writes with the tone of unquestioned authority which this fact, coupled with his own advanced age, would naturally bestow upon him.[3]

The letter contains no particular address, and affords no clue to the place of writing. Its main purpose is to caution its readers against facile speculations which belittle the full significance of the Incarnate Life.[4] This Life the author has himself witnessed, and he therefore knows that it was really lived.[5]

1 *Gaius* is a very common Latin name.

2 See Chapter VIII, pp. 201–208.

3 *1 John* 1^{4}, 2^{12-14}, 5^{13-17}.

4 Ib. 2^{18-25}, 4^{1-3}, 4^{15}, 5^{1}. It was held by some that Christ's human body was not real, so that he was man in appearance only. By others that Jesus was merely a man upon whom the aeon *Christ* (i.e. a species of angel) descended at the Baptism, quitting him before his death. Both theories were probably prompted by mistaken reverence which could not rise to the height of true Christian teaching. In either case there was no *Incarnation*, the Son of God did not die upon the Cross, and the entire Christian scheme comes to the ground.

5 Ib., 1^{1-3}.

We can well understand that such warnings were needed at the close of the apostolic age. It was natural when almost all the eyewitnesses were gone that men should begin to wonder (as they have done at intervals ever since) whether the Christian hope were not after all too good to be true. Does the Life of Jesus really mean as much as the Church believes? Or has the mist of legend magnified it in the eyes of pious fancy?

There was need that the historical facts upon which the Church stands should be emphatically reaffirmed by the last person who was in a position to do so of his own authority. The Life to which Christians look is no product of imagination but that of a real Man who really lived.

It is therefore tempting to conclude that this epistle was intended to be what we should call *a covering letter* to the Fourth Gospel. The Fourth Gospel is written round the text *And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His Glory.*[1] It is intended to make the reader see that that is true: and that no other interpretation of the significance of the life of the Prophet of Nazareth can be counted adequate. With this end in view the author might well feel that an introductory letter, to be read with his Gospel, would be of real value to those for whom he was writing, and would do much to ensure the Gospel's success.

1 John ends with the charge *Little children keep yourselves from idols.* These are in all probability the last words of the New Testament. They are the latest sentence ever penned which the whole Church has finally agreed to call Inspired: the last public utterance of the last person who had seen the Lord. It is probably not merely an accident that the warning which they reiterate is a very old one.

[1] *S. John* 1[14].

IV

THE COMMON ELEMENT IN THE EPISTLES

We have now reviewed briefly the occasions of the various epistles of the New Testament. In the majority of cases there is very little room for doubt as to what these were: in some instances [1] we are reduced to what must be described as probable conjectures. We have been able to see what was uppermost in the authors' minds at the moment of writing, and to appreciate the points which they particularly wished to make. Thus the general tenor of their argument becomes readily intelligible.

The particular circumstances of each letter go far towards accounting for the emphasis which it lays upon particular points, and also towards explaining omissions which might otherwise have perplexed us considerably. We have always to remember that—with the partial exceptions of *Romans* and *Ephesians* [2]—we are dealing with genuine letters, not with formal treatises. And the authors of these letters never imagined that what they had written would before long be raised to the rank of *Scripture*, and be counted amongst the most precious possessions of the Church for all time.

The differences between the epistles are interesting and suggestive. But for the Christian reader of to-day their points of agreement are of more importance. For they were written independently of each other, by several different hands, during a period of about fifty years. They are addressed to a variety of widely separated communities. Under these circumstances we might not unnaturally expect that they would have little in common. But anything which they have in common must be of the greatest interest and importance, because it must represent, beyond question, the general beliefs and practices of the Apostolic

[1] e.g. *2 Peter*, *Jude*, *James*, and the three epistles of *John*.
[2] See Chapter III, pp. 74, 77.

Church. The common element in the epistles must reveal, as nothing else can, what the Church was really like in the days when the Incarnate Life was still within living memory.

It is not possible for us to copy the Church of those days in every detail now, any more than we could substitute Roman civilization for our own. But the Apostolic Church must at the least furnish us with a standard by which to judge the Church life of our own day. It will exhibit with especial clearness the principles which we have to apply under very different conditions. It may not impossibly supply us with some useful warnings.

Now the first point which is bound to strike the attention of any reader is that all the epistles are permeated with the idea of a common life. They are intended for readers who are living together—upon what terms or for what purpose does not for the moment concern us—and become almost unintelligible if this fact be ignored. Fifteen of them are addressed to communities,[1] and the remaining six, though addressed to individuals, are addressed to them as members of communities.

1 and *2 Timothy* and *Titus* are intended for individuals, but contain advice and directions for the ordering of the Churches in charge of which S. Paul had placed them.

2 and *3 John* may have been intended primarily for a single reader, but the reference to the children [2] of the *Elect Lady* and to *the Church* [3] show that the writer had more than an individual correspondent in his mind.

Philemon is the most private of all. But even here the address includes *Apphia* and *Archippus*, and *the Church which is in thy house*.[4]

The first presupposition of all the epistles is that the recipients are leading a common life. There is no hint in them of the existence of any such person as might be described as *an unattached Christian*. It is obvious that the earliest Christians did not look upon themselves as Christians first, and as secondarily or incidentally members of a particular community or local

[1] Nine to the Church of a particular locality, and three to Jewish Christians wherever they may be. The remaining three (*1 John*, *2 Peter*, and *Jude*) to those who share the beliefs of the writers.

[2] *2 John* 4. [3] *3 John* 9. [4] *Philem.* 2, 3.

church. If any such idea had been presented to them they would have scouted it as entirely out of keeping with the genius of their religion. They looked upon themselves as first and foremost members of a community. Their religious life was something which had to be lived in common. That was no accident, nor was it an arrangement which had been adopted for convenience' sake. It was part and parcel of the religion which they professed. We shall misread much of the epistles very seriously if we ever lose sight of that.

Now it is never easy for a number of people to lead a common life. The attempt must always make heavy moral and spiritual demands of those who embark upon it. And the more intense and vigorous the life (in other words the more really worth leading it is) the heavier these demands will be. They are, of course, easier to meet if the circle from which those who are required to meet them are drawn is a restricted one. If it include, for instance, members of one sex, or people of approximately the same social standing, or members of one profession only, who have naturally from the outset many common interests or traditions, the tax upon character will be very considerably diminished.

But the primitive Christian communities did not possess this advantage, if it be an advantage. The circle from which they drew their members knew no artificial restrictions of any kind. It was not limited to one sex, nor to any one rank, occupation, or nationality. It was open to all who wished to enter it. It was therefore composed from the very outset of a number of heterogeneous elements who brought with them no common traditions or experiences of any kind whatever.[1]

Under any circumstances such a venture would be a bold one. When it was first made it can only be termed heroic. For that world was divided against itself with divisions compared with which any that we know are almost trivial.

First came the Jew, in whose eyes all the rest of the world were beyond the reach of God's mercy and to be accounted little better than beasts. The highest privilege to which any Gentile

[1] Except, of course, those with which their Christianity supplied them. But these were necessarily brand-new.

might hope to win was that of being allowed to wait on the true Israelites at the banquet which would be spread for them in Messiah's Kingdom. And very, very few would attain to that.

The exclusive scorn of Jew for Gentile was repaid by the hatred felt by Gentile for Jew: for the strange intractable unsociable people who were to be found almost everywhere, whose mysterious practices might be presumed to cloak unmentionable abominations.

Then came the Greek who knew himself to be, and to have been for centuries, the intellectual leader of the world. His political incapacity had cost him his freedom long since, but he could solace himself by recalling the glories of the past and by summing up all who did not speak his language as *Barbarians*. He at least could have nothing to learn from any foreigner.

Last of all came the Roman who bore himself with the pride natural to a member of a conquering race. There was no power to rival his, and his contempt for the Greeks was bestowed about equally upon their virtues and their vices.

Beside all this there was the immense gulf which yawned between free-man and slave. Except possibly between Brahmin and Pariah in India no such cleavage exists in the world to-day.

Moreover in the Graeco-Roman world the sexes were carefully separated in all matters of religion. Men and women each possessed their own particular rites, and nothing could be more scandalous than the intrusion of either into the other's domain. Men and women could not even share a meal except in the strictest domestic privacy; and any violation of these religious and social conventions was taken as a proof of a character dead to all sense of decency.

Yet, without the least hesitation, the Church ignored all these divisions. Not only did it declare specifically [1] that they are merely superficial: it acted upon the principle that they do not exist.

The strain which this put upon character was very great, and could not but be felt immediately. We cannot therefore be surprised to find that the life of the Christian communities was often marred by faction and quarrelsomeness. In fact if the

[1] e.g. *Col.* 3^{11}.

pictures of it which we possess gave no hint of anything of the kind we should be obliged to suspect their trustworthiness.

It is easy to make this a ground of reproach : and admittedly it cannot be defended. But it is worth while to remember that people only quarrel when they are in earnest, and believe that the points on which they differ relate to matters of real importance. Those whose attitude towards life is one of polite, self-centred indifference are unlikely to get involved in disputes of any kind. But they are not really in a position to criticize those who differ from them completely and fundamentally, first by being very much in earnest about many things, and secondly by trying to live in very intimate fellowship with one another.

The Epistles naturally abound in exhortations to concord, quietness, and mutual forbearance : as will be sufficiently indicated by the following selection of passages :

1. *But we beseech you brethren to know them that labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you : and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. . . . Be long-suffering towards all. See that none render unto any one evil for evil.*[1]

2. *Put on therefore as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, long suffering : forbearing one another and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any . . . and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.*[2]

3. *But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart glory not and lie not against the truth . . . for where jealousy and faction are there is confusion and every vile deed.*[3]

4. *Follow after peace with all men . . . let love of the brethren continue . . . obey them that have the rule over you and submit to them for they watch in behalf of your souls.*[4]

5. *Finally be ye all like-minded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tender-hearted, humble-minded, not rendering evil for evil or reviling for reviling.*[5]

6. *He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in the darkness even until now.*[6]

[1] *1 Thess.* 5^{12-15}. [2] *Col.* 3^{12-15}. [3] *Jas.* 3^{14-16}.
[4] *Hebrews* 12^{14}, 13^{1}, 13^{17}. [5] *1 Peter* 3^{8}. [6] *1 John* 2 9.

If the desire for pre-eminence, such as was displayed by various individuals and cliques, strikes us as petty, it is to be remembered that the Christian assemblies were then (as they bid fair soon to be again) the only ones in the world in which any real freedom remained. The entire civilized world was in the grip of the Roman bureaucracy, which became increasingly efficient and increasingly hostile to liberty as the years went on.[1] Political life as we know it there was none. The Church gave to men and women (especially to women) the opportunity for self-expression which was denied to them by authority or custom in every other sphere. It was almost inevitable that the privilege should sometimes be abused. Diotrephes is not the only person whose head has been turned by the sudden acquisition of freedom to speak and act as he thought fit.[2]

The next most obvious feature of the epistles is their insistence upon a high ethical standard : particularly where the relationship between the sexes is concerned. Exhortations to purity, truthfulness, honesty and integrity of character are repeated again and again with an emphasis which shows that they were urgently required. It could hardly have been otherwise : and it was almost inevitable that there should be some lamentable failures.

We in England cannot in all probability realize how much we owe to thirteen centuries of Christian tradition. Our nation is permeated with Christian ideas which are widely accepted as the foundation and standard of conduct by many who profess no allegiance to the Church, or to any Christian society. We cannot help breathing what does really deserve to be called a Christian atmosphere, and this is worth more to us than is sometimes recognized.

The first generation of Gentile Christians were in a very different position. They had but just emerged from the paganism in which they had, as a matter of course, been brought up. They were a very small minority ; and paganism went its way unrestrained all round them. Public opinion either ignored them or was definitely hostile to their ideals.

[1] Domitian (81–96) was an autocrat in everything but name. Diocletian (284–305) finally abandoned all pretence of constitutional rule.

[2] *3 John* 9, 10.

It must have been extraordinarily hard for them to strip themselves of their inherited traditions and familiar associations, and to maintain a standard of conduct which they themselves had never contemplated a few years before; which no one outside their small circle had ever proposed to adopt. The wonder is not that there were failures, even so grievous as the disaster at Corinth, but that (as in the mission field to-day) the attempt was ever made, and met with any success at all.

The heroic character of the effort, and the difficulty experienced, will be sufficiently illustrated by the following passages. It would be easy to increase their number very considerably.

1. *Now I write unto you not to keep company if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.*[1]

2. *But I say Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh . . . now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I forewarn you that they which practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*[2]

3. *Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord: looking carefully . . . lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby the many be defiled: lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one mess of meat sold his own birthright.*[3]

4. *Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness receive with meekness the implanted word.*[4]

5. *For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, wine-bibbings, revellings, carousings and abominable idolatries wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot.*[5]

6. *Love not the world neither the things that are in the world . . . for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life is not of the Father.*[6]

The twelve passages which have been cited above are a repre-

1 *1 Cor.* 5^{11}. 2 *Gal.* 5^{16-21}. 3 *Hebrews* 12^{14-16}.
4 *Jas.* 1^{21}. 5 *1 Peter* 4^{3-4}. 6 *1 John* 2^{15-16}.

sentative rather than an exhaustive list. They are by five different hands, so that the views which they express cannot be regarded as the personal idiosyncracy of any one teacher. Any one who possesses a copy of the New Testament can reinforce them for himself in a very few minutes. This much at least is clear from them.

If being a Christian in the apostolic age meant anything at all, it meant: First—Leading a common life, in the face of the very wide and stereotyped social, racial, and religious cleavages which stretched across the face of society in every direction; Secondly—Maintaining a much higher standard of conduct than was demanded by law or even commended by public opinion. That is how *The Way* would have presented itself to any outside critic. The enterprise of walking in it proved to be exceedingly difficult, as was to be expected.

The next point therefore which arises is—Why was anybody—or rather why were a number of groups of people in widely separated localities—moved to make the attempt; and what grounds were there for hoping that it could possibly be successful?

It would not be wonderful if we were to find these questions unanswerable, or if we were to be reduced to trying to answer them by means of conjectures which could never deserve to be counted more than plausible. But fortunately this is not the case. The Epistles themselves leave not the slightest room for doubt, but furnish us with a full explicit answer to our queries.

The motive which inspired the Christian groups was from beginning to end a supernatural one. No secondary considerations of any kind, such as might have been prompted by expediency or patriotism,[1] entered in at all. The first Christians tried to live as they did because they believed, with an assurance which did not admit of question, that they stood in a new and peculiar relation to God. This had completely changed their

[1] People who found that their opinions made them unpopular might be driven to form close associations in self-defence. Or they might be sufficiently far-sighted and unselfish to see that the chief need of the State was a high ethical standard amongst its subjects, and might pledge themselves to try to promote it out of loyalty to the Government under which they lived. If the Epistles were silent as to the Christian motive these possibilities would have to be taken into account.

whole view of life. It had given them a new conception of what the relations between man and man ought to be. It was because of the relation in which they stood to God that they were bound to strain every nerve to lead a common life of perfect harmony. And because that relation was permanent and indestructible no failure to reach the ideal within the community could be considered final. Rather it was to be counted a ground for renewed effort.

And the effect of their new relation to God was not limited to their own small circle. It affected all their dealings of every kind with everybody. The heathen might know nothing of the Christian motive, or if he did know of it might regard it with contempt. But that did not relieve the Christian from the necessity of maintaining the highest standard of probity in all his intercourse with an indifferent, or scornful, or even actively hostile world.

Throughout the whole of the apostolic correspondence the supernatural motive and background of the Christian life is never lost sight of for a moment.

In six instances [1] the writers begin by describing themselves as *slaves* of God or of Jesus Christ, a much more striking and forcible expression than the comparatively colourless *servant* of the English versions.

We are accustomed to use the words *slave* and *slavery* metaphorically, and do not expect them to be taken quite seriously. Slavery does not exist in our world, and we can therefore have very little conception of what it really means. In the first century of the Roman Empire slavery was a terrible reality. Every one knew what it meant, and that it was the most fearful fate which could befall any human being. It was the immemorial penalty for defeat in war, and was therefore the culmination of the worst catastrophe possible. Any one who was, or had ever been, a slave would naturally wish to conceal the fact if he could. What was to be thought of men who voluntarily described themselves as *slaves of Jesus Christ*, and appeared to be proud of a title to which in ordinary usage no associations could attach save those of degrading infamy ?

[1] *Rom., Phil., Titus, Jas., 2 Peter, Jude.*

In eight other instances[1] the writers describe themselves as *apostles of Jesus Christ*, or simply as *apostles*. The word has acquired a technical signification, so that we do not generally attempt to translate it. But the nearest English equivalent would be *Envoy Extraordinary*, so that a close and special relation is implied between the *apostle* and the person whose *apostle* he is. Finally in *Philemon* S. Paul describes himself as *the prisoner of Jesus Christ*: and the author of *Hebrews* begins with the assertion that *God has spoken unto us by His Son*.

In every case the implication is the same. The writer's title to be heard does not rest upon his own ability or merits, but upon his peculiar relationship to Jesus Christ. Usually He stands alone as the immediate authority, though His Place is *through the Will of God*. But three times[2] He is—if we may so say—bracketed with God in a way which would be startling if it were not so familiar to us. And it is particularly noteworthy that this collocation occurs in *James*, the most Jewish in tone of all the epistles, and one of the three which were perhaps intended primarily for readers of Jewish blood. If James the Just, and the readers whom he contemplated, had been brought up to believe anything they had been brought up to believe that God is One and that there is none like Him. How then had it become possible for any other name to be associated so closely with His ?

The same assumption is made on behalf of those to whom the letters are addressed. They are called *the chosen out*,[3] or *the called*,[4] or *saints*,[5] and language in keeping with these lofty salutations occurs repeatedly in the course of each letter. The Christian communities are regarded as having been brought collectively into new and intimate association with God. The association may not be precisely the same as that of the writers who address them, but it is no less real and vital. It is their *raison d'être* as communities, it makes the distinction between what they have been (which is what their neighbours still are) and what they are now. It is the cause of the new way of living

[1] *1 Pet.*, *1* and *2 Cor.*, *Gal.*, *Eph.*, *Col.*, *1* and *2 Tim.*
[2] *Jas.*, *Gal.*, *Titus.* [3] *1 Pet.*, *2 John.* (See Chapter III, pp. 86, 90).
[4] *Jude*, *Rom.*, *1 Cor.* [5] *Rom.*, *1* and *2 Cor.*, *Eph.*, *Phil.*, *Col.*

which they have adopted, to which they are endeavouring to remain faithful. It is the foundation and justification of every counsel, warning or appeal which is addressed to them. No one can read the apostolic letters without seeing that. There can be no question as to the general standpoint from which they were written, or as to the grounds upon which it was expected that they should be received.

Now it is conceivable that these assumptions might be dismissed as fiction. It might be argued that some one (S. Paul or whoever it might be) having become deeply impressed with the need of raising the general moral standard of the time, and being conscious of the extraordinary difficulty of doing so, invented the idea of specially intimate association with God in order to provide the motive without which he knew that his well-planned schemes of social reform must inevitably fail. A fiction so magnificent, which achieved such wide and rapid success would, incidentally, have a claim to the title *Inspired*, which it would be difficult to dispute. But that is beside our immediate point. What concerns us now is the way in which the underlying assumptions of the epistles are put forward. They are not profferred timidly—as a theory which might be challenged—or proudly as the latest triumph of the human intellect. They do not invite discussion from the philosophical standpoint, because they are not a philosophical system. Their appeal is to the facts of very recent history. Men have not made their way to this new relation towards God by their own ability or merit. They have been brought to it by His act. God has done certain things, and therefore the world can never be the same place again. Or if we consider that to say *God has done certain things* begs the question (though the apostolic writers themselves would not have hesitated to use the phrase) we may say *Certain things have happened, and these new and subversive views of the relation of God to man, and of men one to another, are the result.*

Naturally these events are not fully described, because they were already matters of common knowledge amongst the people to whom the letters are addressed. The epistles are not missionary documents: that is to say they are not concerned with

setting out the Christian faith fully from the very beginning. They are intended for readers who have already received Christian teaching, and are trying to lead a Christian life. The supernatural background is therefore assumed rather than explained. But its leading features are sufficiently clear. Its centre is in a Person who is described indifferently by His Personal Name *Jesus*, or by the title *Christ*, which is the Greek equivalent of *Messiah*. The word had meant much in Jewish religion for many centuries but would require to be explained carefully to Gentiles. Sometimes He is referred to under the combination of Personal Name and Title as *Jesus Christ* or as *Christ Jesus*. Sometimes he is merely called *The Lord*. In one or other of these forms He figures upon almost every page.

It is clear that in Him we are dealing with a Person—not with a system or an idea : but as we read what is said about Him we are filled with astonishment as to what manner of Person this can be. For the language held about Him is such as has surely never been applied to any other human being in the world. To pious minds, especially if they had been trained in the Jewish religion, it would appear to amount to the most horrible blasphemy.

Thus He is described as the *Lord of Glory* ;[1] a title which in Jewish ears at least could belong properly to God alone.

He is called *the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation ; for in Him were all things created . . . and He is before all things and in Him all things consist.*[2] And it is said that *in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*[3]

He is repeatedly described as *Saviour*. The title occurs in the Old Testament, and was sometimes given by the Greeks to Zeus and to other divinities. It naturally suggests a God, but we can imagine circumstances in which it might legitimately be given to a human being. It had been in fact part of the royal style of the Greek kings of Egypt. But if a person, whether divine or human, is called *Saviour*, the question naturally arises—From what does He save ?

Now a man may save others from famine, or from tyranny, or from defeat in war : or a god may succour his worshippers

[1] *Jas.* 2[1]. [2] *Col.* 1[15-18] ; cf. *Heb.* 1[2-4]. [3] *Col.* 2[9].

when human skill is of no avail. When we speak of *Salvation* in this sense it is a real thing as far as it goes. He to whom it is owed may rightly be called a *Saviour*.

But the epistles make it clear that the salvation achieved by Jesus is not of this local or transient kind. It does not begin and end at any particular place: it is not limited to any one particular set of people, nor can any turn of the wheel of fortune destroy it. It is salvation from sin, and is open to the whole world:[1] and therefore the title *Saviour* when applied to Him assumes a new and, in the strict sense of the word, *supernatural* significance.

It is unnecessary to multiply passages of similar tenor to those which have been quoted above. Any reader of the Bible can prolong the list for himself.

It is clear that the Person and Work of Jesus are the very centre of the apostolic writers' faith. He is not merely a great teacher, comparable with Moses, or Elijah, or with any one of the prophets. His position in the universe is unique: and although He is not to be identified with *the Father* His claim upon our devotion and loyalty is not less than the claim of God Himself. Men may dissent from this view to-day. They may consider that it is due to the ill-balanced enthusiasm of the first Christian circle—in spite of the fact that there is no other ground for thinking that the first Christians were ill-balanced enthusiasts, and that there are many strong reasons for holding that they were nothing of the kind. But that such was the belief of the apostolic Church does not admit of question. The documents are before us, and their testimony is explicit and unanimous.

But if there is no room for doubt as to what may be called the apostolic estimate of Jesus, we are naturally compelled to ask—Upon what was this estimate based? How did it come about that so startling a departure in religion was made? What can we learn from the epistles as to this Person who, in Christian thought, shares the throne of the universe with God Himself?

On this point the epistles throw less light than we might desire: though not less than is to be expected in view of their

[1] e.g. *1 Thess.* 1^{10}; *Rom.* 1^{16}, 6^{6}; *Eph.*, 2^{1-9}; *1 Pet.* 2^{24}; *1 John* 2^{1-2}, &c.

character and the object with which they were written. But if they were our only source of information our perplexity with regard to the Person of Jesus would be very great. This much, however, may be gathered from them.

1. He was a real person of whom men who were alive when the epistles were being written had first-hand personal knowledge. He had really lived, and His life was a matter of very recent history.[1]

2. He had been put to death by the Jews: the method being the peculiarly disgraceful one of crucifixion which was commonly reserved for criminals of the worst type.[2] Nothing is said as to the circumstances which led up to this 'judicial murder': nor as to the grounds on which it had been perpetrated.

3. But although He had really died in this way He is alive now. This fact was established in the first instance by the evidence of various eyewitnesses who saw Him alive after He had died upon the Cross. His death and resurrection are both equally indisputable.[3]

These are the outstanding historical facts, which in the eyes of the apostolic writers were as certain as that there was a temple at Jerusalem, or that Caesar reigned at Rome. If any one should attempt to cast any doubt upon them he could be confuted by the evidence of eyewitnesses. But there is much less reference than we might have expected to any incidents in the life of Jesus before His crucifixion: nor is there any attempt to record any teaching which He may have given.[4] The apostolic faith is founded upon His Person rather than upon His words: upon what He was, rather than upon what He said or did.

It is necessary to call attention to this point because it is very often overlooked. There are many people to-day who seem to imagine that Christianity consists of the recorded sayings of Christ. It is open to us on this theory to take them one by one, to criticize them separately; to affirm our agreement with those which happen to commend themselves to us, and to

[1] *1 John* 1^{1-3}. (It is to be remembered that this is the latest of all the epistles.)

[2] *Phil.* 2^{8}; *Heb.* 6^{6}; *1 Pet.* 2^{24}, &c.

[3] *1 Cor.* 15^{1-8}; *Heb.* 13^{20}; *1 Pet.* 13, &c.

[4] With the single exception of *1 Cor.* 11^{23-6}. And this was received from the *risen* Lord.

discard the rest. The outcome of this proceeding will be that a good many of them will be dismissed as quite inapplicable to modern conditions, and a large part of the Church's system will be made to appear superfluous. It cannot therefore be stated too plainly that this attitude towards Christianity has nothing in common with the apostolic faith, and in the eyes of the Church is merely futile ploughing of the sand.

It is not meant that the recorded sayings of our Lord are unimportant. Far from it. But their supreme, unique importance lies in the fact that they are revelations of a Character. What matters is not—What do we think of this saying or of that? Nor—How does this action strike us? But—When we have pondered the whole story what is our estimate of the Character which it reveals? Our title and desire to call ourselves *Christians*, our whole view of Life and Death, of God and Man, of Things Present and Things to Come, will depend upon that. In the last resort everything turns upon the answer which we are prepared to return to His own question—*What think ye of Christ?*

From the indisputable historical facts that Christ lived, died, and rose again the following conclusions are drawn by the apostolic writers which, however overwhelming they may appear, cannot be regarded as disproportionate to the momentous character of the historical events on which they rest. If a man really rose from the dead the fact cannot be writ in water. Its uniqueness must be expected to give rise to consequences of a unique kind.

1. He is alive now and for all time.

It is not merely that He has evaded death once, or that His Life has been prolonged beyond the normal span, as legend declared that that of the Patriarchs had been. Rather He has triumphed over death once and for all, so that for Him it has, and can have, no further meaning. Thus the apparent victory gained by His enemies has been turned to their complete discomfiture, and to His own most signal triumph.[1]

And not only that, but His death has—if we may so say—enhanced His Personality. Because He died and rose again He

[1] *Rom.* 6^{9-11}; *Col.* 2^{15}; *Heb.* 10^{12-13}; 13^{8}, &c.

is now and for ever more than He was before His crucifixion. He is now what He could not have been (or at least what men could never have understood Him to be) before He died.[1]

2. In Him God has been revealed as never before.

The Jews were accustomed to believe that God had revealed Himself to them as He had not done to any other people. This conviction was part of the traditional religious inheritance of the first Christians. It was in fact the foundation of everything else which they were taught, and they were not prepared either to discard or to belittle it. The revelation of Himself which God had granted through the medium of the Old Covenant was in no way abrogated by the New. But the new revelation transcends the old at every point. God's purpose for the world has now been brought into far fuller and clearer light: and its range is seen to be vaster than had been imagined. It is not restricted within the bounds of physical descent, but includes the whole of mankind. We can now speak of God's Mind and Purpose with a width of knowledge and with a certainty which were previously beyond human reach.[2] A full and complete answer has at length been furnished to the most important question in the world, which has hitherto proved the most perplexing—What is God like? [3]

3. In one sense He is absent from the world. But in another He is ever present and in the closest touch with His followers.

His *coming* is spoken of as an event which is still future, and is to be eagerly anticipated.[4] S. Paul can speak of desiring *to depart and be with Christ*,[5] as an alternative to continuing to live in this world. But there is no suggestion that Christ has abandoned the world even for a time, as a man might abandon his estate to the care of his servants while he made a journey to a distant country.

The belief that He is in very truth alive does not rest solely on the testimony of the eyewitnesses to whom He appeared

1 *Phil.* 2^{9-11}, *Heb.* 4^{14}, 7^{26-8}, 8^{1}.

2 *Eph.* 3^{8-15}, 4^{13-16}; *Col.* 2^{3}; *1 Tim.* 2^{4}; *Rom.* 2^{4}; &c.

3 The Old Testament had provided a better answer than was forthcoming from any other source. But it had not been a full nor entirely satisfactory one.

4 *1 Thess.* $4^{15, 16}$; *2 Thess.* 2^{1}; *1 Cor.* 11^{26}.

5 *Phil.* 1^{23}.

after His death and burial. It is not entirely a matter of historical evidence. The historical evidence is of unique importance now as it was then, inasmuch as it provides the necessary starting-point for rational Christian faith. But while it is the beginning it is not the end. The fact that Christ lives, and that men can enter into communion with Him, can be attested by the spiritual experience of every individual believer.[1] Believers are said to be *in Christ*, and He to be *in them*: they are even spoken of as sharing His death and resurrection.

Here we are admittedly on mysterious ground, and there are to-day many who would discount such language as metaphorical or exaggerated. But we have no reason to suppose that the writers who employed it meant anything less than what they said. And the reality of the spiritual experience of which they speak has been very remarkably attested by successive Christian generations. If there is any point with regard to which the Saints of all ages and countries are in agreement it is this—That the most intimate fellowship between the risen Christ and the individual soul is possible. The historical facts of the Death and Resurrection of Christ are the only foundation upon which a Christian experience of any real value can rest. Divorced from them pious fancy always wanders into unedifying paths. But the strength of the foundations is evinced by the solidity of the structures which can be raised upon them.

The apostolic writers do not attempt to explain exactly how this can be. Probably no explanation is or ever was possible. They are content to state their conviction as to the fact. We can only dismiss their conviction as illusory if we are clear, first that we know everything which can be known about Personality: and secondly that the entire range of genuine spiritual experience is within our own personal horizon.

4. The Death of Jesus has had a unique effect upon sin.

He has not only left us an inspiring example by dying for the cause of truth as others have done both before and after His time. His Death means more to the world than that. It has in some way delivered mankind, both individually and corporately, from the grip of sin.

[1] *Rom.* 6^{3-6}; *Col.* 2^{12-13}, 3^{1}; *Heb.* 3^{6}, ^{14}; *1 John* 1^{3}, 4^{15}, 5^{12}.

It has thus provided a full and final answer to the problem to which all religions worth anything always have addressed themselves, and always must. *How can I get rid of this intolerable burden of sin?*

Hitherto the problem had seemed insoluble. In many eyes it is insoluble now. But all Christians have always believed that an answer to the question has been found in the Death of Christ upon the Cross.

This point is of such importance that it will be worth while to quote in full a few representative passages.

(*a*) *Having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.*[1]

(*b*) *Christ having been once offered to bear the sins of many shall appear a second time apart from sin to them that wait for Him unto salvation.*[2]

(*c*) *Who His own self bare our sins in his own Body upon the tree, that we having died unto sins might live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed.*[3]

(*d*) *The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.*[4]

The list might easily be prolonged. But the passages quoted above will be sufficient to illustrate the point. In somewhat different language the four authors are all saying exactly the same thing. The Death of Christ has done more than point to a way of escape from sin, which we might or might not find ourselves able to follow. It has actually dealt with sin, once and for all, so that the problem can never be again what it was before. The power of sin has been definitely and for ever destroyed by the Cross.

This belief is known to Christian theology as the *Doctrine of the Atonement.* It is undoubtedly a stumbling-block to many minds to-day: particularly to those who are on the fringe of the Catholic Church, or outside it altogether. It can never be easy of acceptance, and it would be outside the scope of this book to attempt any systematic discussion of it here.[5] But this much

1 *Col.* 2^{14}. 2 *Heb.* 9^{28}. 3 *1 Pet.* 2^{24}. 4 *1 John* 1^{7}.

5 For a very thorough discussion within moderate compass see *The Doctrine of the Atonement,* by J. K. Mozley (Duckworth 1915). An attempt to explain it has been made by H. Rashdall in the Bampton Lectures for 1915. *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (Macmillan 1919).

may be said. The Church has never accepted any *theory* of the Atonement: It has contented itself with affirming the fact. Many theories have been put forward from time to time, and some of them are rightly repudiated as immoral by the Christian conscience of to-day. They were evolved in the light of forensic or social ideas which happened to prevail at the time, and cannot stand apart from them. But upon none of them has the Church ever set the seal of its approval. And the crudest of them have for the most part been taught by those who had deliberately and definitely withdrawn from the Church's communion.

When pious people to-day profess themselves 'unable to accept the doctrine of the Atonement' a little examination generally reveals that what they are unwilling to accept is no more than a particular theory of the Atonement which has been put forward by some individual teacher. And in nine cases out of ten the teacher in question is some one who avowedly stands outside the Catholic Church. The Church cannot therefore be expected to endorse his teaching. But many people seem to be quite unable to distinguish between the speculations of individuals and the Church's creed.

As sin destroys the relationship which ought to exist between God and man it is unlikely that we shall arrive at a full understanding of how the Death of Christ has destroyed sin (that is, at a completely satisfactory *theory* of the Atonement) until we know everything which there is to be known about God and about ourselves.

In these four outstanding convictions about the Person of Jesus which underlie the apostolic writings we have a motive sufficient for the very difficult task to which, as we have seen, the first Christians addressed themselves. Here are grounds for trying to lead a new kind of life. If these beliefs are true they have made the world a different place, and human life must be remodelled by the light which streams from them. It is not true, as is sometimes said, that the first Christians shaped their creed by their life. On the contrary they shaped their life by their creed. Their only reason for trying to live as they did was because they believed certain things about God. The new life was to be lived corporately as well as individually.

Indeed the corporate aspect came first. There is no suggestion that the individual Christian could practise his religion entirely by himself. He was first and foremost a member of the Christian Society (because God's plan was to bring all mankind to a unity, and this unity was to be realized and furthered by every particular Christian group, each group being a constituent portion of the undivided and indivisible Church) to which he owed his loyalty, from which he drew his inspiration.

And as the Society existed for the purpose of translating certain beliefs and principles into life it was necessary that it should from the outset possess rules of some kind. Otherwise it could not retain any distinctive character. Presumably these rules were not very numerous or elaborate: and naturally the apostolic writings do not present us with any formal table of them. It is impossible to make the Church of to-day an exact replica of the Church of the New Testament because our knowledge of the original is not sufficiently detailed. Questions of administration necessarily arise to-day to which the New Testament offers no direct answer. And this would still be the case if our knowledge of the apostolic period were much more complete than it is. But the following features emerge distinctly.

1. The Church, which in this connexion means each particular local Church, can exercise disciplinary authority over its own members. It can expel any one whose conduct has disgraced it, and can readmit him subsequently if it think fit. Without such authority its ethical standard would gradually relapse to the pagan level.[1]

2. In every Church there was a recognized orderly government. Something of the kind would have had to be evolved in any case, in the interests of the disciplinary authority. Wherever authority of any kind exists there must be an executive of some sort, as otherwise the authority will exist only in name. Decisions must be pronounced by some representative voice, or signed by some representative hand.

Twice S. Paul assumes the existence of what may be called

[1] *1 Cor.* 5; *2 Cor.* 2^{6-8}; *Titus* 3^{10}; *3 John* 10. The fact that in this instance the power was being abused does not affect the legitimacy of its existence.

a hierarchy, which might comprise as many as eight ranks; and he considers that these different offices are all part of God's plan.[1] They have not been evolved by the Church under pressure of necessity. The holders of them have been *set in the Church* by God, and the powers which they wield have been *given* by Him.

But the authority of the officers of the Church is not restricted to dealing with special emergencies, such as that which had arisen at Corinth. It is part of the normal equipment of the Christian Society, in every place and under all circumstances. Ordinarily it is vested in people called *elders*.[2] In the letters to Timothy and Titus the title *Overseer* (*Bishop* in the English Versions) is substituted for *Elder*, and the *Overseer* is to be assisted by officers of inferior rank who are called *Deacons*. The organization of the Church would naturally tend to become more complicated as time went on, and it would appear that whilst *Elders* were universal,[3] *Deacons* only existed where local conditions made their services necessary.

We need not stay to inquire exactly what powers and duties were entrusted to these officers, nor ask how faithfully they are represented by the threefold ministry with which the Catholic Church has been familiar for more than seventeen centuries. The point is that Order and Authority are unquestionable notes of the Apostolic Church. There is a definite form of government, which does not depend upon any congregational election, but is as much part of the Divine Plan as is the existence of the Church itself.

3. There is one method of admission to the Christian Society (which means to the possibility of leading a Christian life) and that is by the rite of Baptism. Naturally, it is nowhere stated explicitly that Baptism is of universal obligation, but it is assumed as a matter of course by the apostolic writers that all those whom they are addressing have, in common with themselves, been baptized.[4]

It is true that S. Paul when writing to the Corinthians says

[1] *1 Cor.* 12[28]; *Eph.* 4[11].
[2] *Jas.* 5[14]; *1 Pet.* 5[1]; *2 John* 1; *3 John* 1. [3] *Titus* 1[5].
[4] *Rom.* 6[3, 4]; *1 Cor.* 12[13]; *Eph.* 4[5]; *Heb.* 6[2]; *1 Pet.* 3[21]; *Titus* 3[5].

that he himself had baptized very few of them, because God had called him to preach the Gospel rather than to baptize. But that disclaimer was due to the factious disputings which had arisen as to the merits of 'rival' baptisms. The Corinthians could not have taken up the attitude which they did towards any rite which was not generally recognized as being of the first importance.[1]

A visible society must necessarily have some common method of admission to its ranks, and it is obvious that such a ceremony as baptism would serve the purpose very well.[2] Washing was a natural symbol of the new life upon which the Christian convert was entering. But the language of the Epistles makes it clear that in apostolic eyes Baptism was more than this. It was not merely a picturesque piece of symbolism. It had not been selected out of many possibilities, any one of which would have served the purpose equally well.

Its significance lay in the fact that it brought the recipient into that close personal relationship with Jesus (both as an individual and corporately by means of the Church of which it made him a member) which, as we have seen, was the foundation, motive and *raison d'être* of the entire Christian scheme of living. It placed him once and for all upon that supernatural plane upon which the rest of his life was to be lived. How or why it could accomplish this is not explained. But there is no room for doubt that that is how it was regarded.

4. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is only referred to once in the Epistles, in the first of S. Paul's letters to the Church of Corinth.[3] But the language which he uses leaves no room for doubt that as an institution it was common to all Churches. It is inconceivable that S. Paul could have delivered to one Church only something which he had *received of the Lord*, or that what was a regular practice at Corinth should not have been equally familiar to the rest of the Christian world. We may therefore safely assume that the Lord's Supper was a normal

[1] *1 Cor.* 1^{12-17}.

[2] It is said to have been practised in pre-Christian times by the Essenes, an ascetic sect of Jews. It was not apparently an entire novelty when adopted by John the Baptist.

[3] *1 Cor.* 10^{16}, 17; 11^{20-34}.

feature of the Apostolic Church. The fact that at Corinth alone did the celebration of it call for regulation is the reason that it is specifically mentioned in one letter only.

A common meal is a natural symbol of unity, and an obvious method of maintaining and strengthening the sense of unity between people whose lives were widely sundered in other respects. And paganism furnished precedents for the application of what is primarily a social custom to religion.

But S. Paul's language shows that in his eyes the Lord's Supper is something more than this. It is not merely a social gathering: it is not merely a commemoration. It brings those who take part in it into an association with the Lord Jesus of so special a character that there is something awful and even hazardous about it. It is not to be approached in any light, careless, or unworthy spirit. And in putting forward these views there is no suggestion that they contained anything which the Corinthians did not know before. He is not teaching them anything fresh: but reminding them of what they knew already. Their knowledge of the true nature of the Lord's Supper ought to have kept them from the excesses of which they had been guilty in connexion with it.

Again—no explanation is vouchsafed. But that the simple acts of breaking the bread and sharing the cup possess what may be called a supernatural reference is assumed as an indisputable fact of common knowledge.

One outstanding characteristic of the apostolic writers remains: namely their antagonism to false doctrines and to those who propagate them. This element in their teaching is too widespread to be illustrated by references or by quotations. It could not escape the notice of the most superficial reader. Its prominence is natural when we remember that the majority of the Epistles were (as we saw in the previous chapter) occasioned by the necessity of combating doctrinal errors of various kinds.

It is in this respect that the temper of the apostolic writers differs most widely from that of the average man or woman of to-day. In our world the word *dogma* is regarded with a mixture of horror and contempt, and is invariably treated as if it meant something which is necessarily hostile to 'true religion'. If by

'true religion' we are to understand no more than such religious or semi-religious ideas as happen to have commended themselves for the time being to the particular speaker, it is indeed not unlikely that most *dogmas* will appear superfluous, if not altogether intolerable. But if the phrase 'true religion' should happen to mean a religion which has anything to do with abstract truth, and may therefore be expected to distinguish sharply between truth and falsehood, then it cannot exist without *dogma*. For *dogma* is simply another name for the results which are reached by clear, careful, earnest, systematic thinking. These results are not necessarily infallible, but there is no other way in which it is possible for men to arrive at any knowledge of the truth. There is no other method by which it is possible to preserve any distinction between what is true and what is not. Conscience and emotion both have a part to play in religion, but it is not their function to provide a simple substitute for intellectual processes. If we make them an excuse for evading the laborious task of thinking, they will prove to be no more trustworthy guides than a will o' the wisp, and are likely to lead us to a somewhat similar goal.

Dogma is not peculiar to religion, though it plays a larger part there than anywhere else, because religion is perhaps the only thing which is necessarily concerned with nothing whatever save truth. In other spheres considerations of expediency may sometimes have a legitimate part to play, and therefore the distinction between truth and falsehood is not so sharply drawn. But every field of activity in which the human mind can possibly exercise itself must possess its dogmas. Art, Literature, Law, Mathematics, Natural Science—all these have many dogmas of their own, without which the pursuit of them could not be carried on. In these spheres dogmatic statements are generally received (under the title of Expert Opinion) with a respect which is sometimes almost excessive. It is only where religion is concerned that it is widely assumed that Expert Opinion cannot possibly be right, and that it is inspired either by ignorance, or by a deliberate desire to mislead. As a matter of fact, the principal dogmas of the Christian religion have behind them a weight of authority far greater than can be found anywhere

else. On scientific principles they are to be accounted the most trustworthy of all.

It is impossible to acquit our generation from the charge of possessing a very inadequate sense of truth in religion. A great deal of what passes for broad-minded toleration is in reality nothing but a confession of failure: of intellectual failure if it spring from genuine inability to distinguish between truth and falsehood: of moral failure if it spring from unwillingness to make the attempt. To our lukewarmness, timidity, and hesitation in maintaining that the distinction between truth and falsehood is real and vital the Epistles present the sharpest possible contrast.

The apostolic writers had an extraordinarily keen sense of truth and appreciation of its importance. That is part of what we mean when we say that they were *Inspired*. The facts of the Divine Life, and the results which flowed from it, were so clear to them that no attempt to deny or explain away any part of their teaching could be tolerated. They did not regard themselves as putting forward theories, which might be accepted in their entirety by some and in part only by others. They were not anxiously awaiting the world's verdict on what they had to say, nor were they in the least disposed to defer to its opinions or prejudices. They were proclaiming truths which did not admit of the least modification in the interests of any individual or party. They were not on their trial before the world, but were bringing the world to the bar of judgement. Those who heard them might accept their teaching, or might reject it. But if they rejected it they did so at their own peril. And when we note how their sublime intellectual assurance, which can only be the fruit of prolonged and mental discipline, is combined with personal humility, we shall begin to understand (upon the human side) the secret of the power which they wielded and of the success which they won.

If *those* two characteristics of the Apostolic Church could be reproduced in the Church of to-day it would probably be unnecessary to trouble ourselves about any others. We might then expect with considerable confidence that all the outstanding questions which confront us at present would settle themselves before very long.

Such in outline is the picture of the Church with which the apostolic letters present us. The Christian Society appears as a phenomenon to which previous history offers no parallel. It exists at a number of different places; but the different groups, although widely separated, regard themselves as forming one indivisible whole. The members of each particular group are endeavouring to lead a common corporate life which sublimely ignores the wide and deep crevasses of race, rank, and sex which stretched across their world in every direction. At the same time they had set themselves an ethical standard which every one outside their own tiny circle would have agreed in dismissing as probably undesirable in theory and certainly unattainable in practice. Both these undertakings proved to be matters of extreme difficulty. The motive for making the attempt in the first instance, and for persevering in it after discouraging failures, is found in the relationship existing between the Church and Jesus. This relationship is both corporate and individual. It concerns the Church as a whole and each individual member of it alike, though there is no idea that the individual relationship can exist apart from the corporate one. Yet very little is told us about what Jesus said or did. It appears that He had lived within the memory of the writers. He had been put to death by his enemies, but had risen again from the dead, so that his apparent defeat had been turned into an overwhelming and final triumph. This astonishing fact has made the world an entirely different place. He is alive now and for evermore. He reigns at the centre of the universe, and by virtue of His death and resurrection has a claim upon the love, loyalty, and obedience of all mankind which cannot be distinguished from the claim of God Himself.

The estimate of His Person which the letters reveal is unique in the annals of religion. Of no other being who ever trod this earth has such language as is applied again and again to Jesus ever been used. And because He died and rose again, because He is what He is, for His sake and for no other reason whatsoever the Christian life is worth living—and can be lived despite its surpassing difficulty. At every point the whole scheme runs back to Jesus. The Christians are breathing a new atmosphere,

because, if we may so say, it is impregnated with Him. He has made clear to them truths which were unknown before, and are still hidden from all other eyes. He has furnished them with moral power the very existence of which had been unsuspected hitherto. He is the Key to the mysteries of Life and Death.

Such are the conclusions which a careful reading of the Epistles compels us to draw. If we had no other knowledge of the religion to which they belong, our study of them would give rise to innumerable perplexities. But when we had thought it all over it could have but one effect upon us. One thing at least would become clear and certain. There would arise in our minds a question so vast and insistent that we should be obliged to lay aside all other preoccupations until we had found the answer—if there be an answer to be found anywhere in the world—*Who was Jesus?*

V

THE REVELATION OF S. JOHN

THE question *Who was Jesus?* is forced upon us by the apostolic letters. And as regards the problem which they raise it makes no difference whether we read them as disciples, or merely as critics. They present us with an historical phenomenon of a very remarkable character. They show us that before the end of the first century of the Roman Empire there had appeared at a number of different places little groups of people who were trying to live in a new and peculiar way which they found exceedingly difficult. Their reason for making the attempt was their conviction that they had been brought into a new relationship with God, which carried with it a new relationship to each other and to all mankind. This had been effected by the Life and Death of Jesus, and rested absolutely upon Him. The whole Christian scheme runs back to Him at every point. It could not have come into existence without Him: its justification and its purpose depend entirely upon Him.

Such beyond question were the beliefs of the first Christians: and it is obvious that men could not have come to hold such views, which compelled them to remodel their daily lives at almost every point, for any slight or trivial reason.

We may, if we choose, dismiss their beliefs as ill-founded, though we must admit that their ethical ideal was admirable and that the world would be a very much better place if it were more diligently pursued by more people to-day. But we have no right to dismiss as idle beliefs which exerted so powerful an influence over those who held them until we have done our best to investigate the foundations upon which they rested. This brings us back to the question—*Who was Jesus?* Can we discover enough about Him to understand how and why the estimate of His Person which appears on almost every page of the apostolic writings ever came to be formed?

Before we proceed to examine the four brief memoirs of Him which we possess there are two other books which have a claim upon our attention. They throw some further light, albeit from a somewhat different angle, upon the historical phenomenon of the Apostolic Church. As it is our object to account for that phenomenon, if we can, it will be to our interest not to overlook any light which can be thrown upon it from any quarter. And it is also our purpose to bring every book of the New Testament into relation to the Church from which it sprung, in order to attain the standpoint which will enable us to read it most profitably.

The two books which we have now to consider are, first *The Revelation of S. John,* and second *The Acts of the Apostles.*

No book of the Bible has attracted so much attention in modern times as has the *Revelation of S. John.* The interest which it has awakened has not been limited to the comparatively small circle of professed scholars and students. The catalogue of any dealer in second-hand books reveals the existence of an almost incredible number of 'explanations', 'expositions', and 'interpretations' of the *Revelation,* by a variety of authors, most of whom are otherwise quite unknown.

The first twenty years of the last century seem to have been particularly prolific in such works, though the output has been fairly well maintained down to our own time. The late war has probably given it a stimulus, unless the difficulties in the way of publication were too great. But the second-hand dealers' catalogues cannot as yet afford us much information on this point.

This widespead interest is quite intelligible, and may be ascribed principally to the following causes:

1. The *Apocalypse* (to give it the name by which it is commonly known amongst scholars) appeals naturally to the imagination of every reader by reason of its picturesque and luxuriant imagery. No one could possibly find it dull reading.

2. Its avowedly mysterious character affords endless scope for the ingenuity of the reader. The *Apocalypse* presents itself as a puzzle to which no one has as yet found the key. Therefore it is still possible that any one may find it, and the attempt

to do so possesses the almost irresistible fascination which attaches to any quest. Here we embark upon a voyage of discovery, whereas in the other books of the New Testament we feel that we are navigating well-charted seas. For the ordinary reader the romance of exploration belongs to the *Apocalypse* alone.

3. It was obviously written for times of trouble. Its atmosphere is one of war, and therefore in time of war our thoughts are naturally (and rightly) drawn towards it. Our great-grandfathers found no difficulty in identifying Napoleon I with *The Beast* or with *Apollyon*, and it may be presumed that William II has discharged the same function for many of our generation.

4. It is the only book of the New Testament which looks as if it could be made to bear upon the future, whether immediate or remote. The other books deal with events which belong to the past and will never be repeated. Therefore for many people who do not realize that Christ lives and works to-day they possess no interest beyond a slight antiquarian one. But there is always a strong and widespread desire to know what the immediate future will be. In war-time especially, when momentous events tread hard upon one another's heels, when no one can say what the next week may or may not bring forth, the desire to know what is going to happen next is immensely increased. People will hasten to explore any avenue which seems to offer the slightest prospect of satisfying it: and of these avenues the *Apocalypse* is considered to be one.

There is of course a real sense in which it does bear upon the future. It speaks of the final triumph of Good over Evil which from our human standpoint is not complete as yet. It looks forward to the day when character shall have assumed its final form, and the present order shall be no more. But these lessons belong to Peace no less than to War. The *Apocalypse* will not yield the kind of information about the future which some try to extract from it in times of trouble.

But if no book of the Bible has been more widely read, it is certain that none has been more generally misunderstood. Meanings which never crossed the author's mind have been read into it, while much of what he really wished to convey has been ignored.

This is due to the fact that the *Apocalypse of S. John* is for most English readers a unique book. It bears no resemblance to anything else which they have ever met with, except to parts of the book of *Daniel*. And *Daniel* has fared equally badly at our hands.

As a preliminary to understanding the *Apocalypse* aright two facts must be borne in mind.

1. It is not unique in itself, though it is the only specimen of the class of literature to which it belongs which the Church has thought worthy of a place in the New Testament. That means that it stands above all similar writings, and that it has a special claim upon our attention. But it does not mean that there is nothing else like it to be found elsewhere.

A person who knew nothing of either the principles of dramatic art or the technique of a theatre, who moreover was unacquainted with the history of England, would find a good deal to perplex him in such a work as Shakespeare's *King Henry V*. He might be able to appreciate some of it in detail as poetry. But his ideas as to what it was really all about, and as to the author's purpose in writing it, would probably be somewhat confused.

Yet he would be very much in the position in which the ordinary English reader of the Bible finds himself when he turns to the *Apocalypse of S. John*.

The *Apocalypse of S. John* belongs to a class of literature which was produced in considerable quantities in Jewish and Jewish-Christian circles between about 200 B.C. and A.D. 100. It therefore covers a period as long as that which separates us from Shakespeare. This literature is called *apocalyptic* from the Greek word *apocaluptein*, which means *to reveal*. It gets its name from the fact that it deals in visions. The writers say that they *saw* certain things which they describe. For the most part they are content to describe what they saw without explanation, leaving it to their readers to interpret the visions for themselves. Apocalypses are the work of *Seers*, who seek to instruct by means of the eye, painting as it were a picture for their readers, rather than of *Prophets* (in the strict sense of the word) whose appeal is to the ear, by means of the spoken word.

It would be out of place to attempt to discuss here the

psychology of visions. It does not concern our immediate point: and probably no one is competent to handle it who has not seen at least one vision himself. But the fact that the Seers generally leave their visions to explain themselves goes far to acquit them of any conscious imposture. A Seer who honestly believes that he has been inspired by God can have no doubt as to the value of what he has recorded. He is confident that God will make the meaning of the vision clear and fruitful for those for whom it is intended. Therefore he may safely leave the interpretation alone. But a man who knew that his own sincerity was questionable would be almost certain to be at pains to point the moral which he wished his readers to draw.

Apocalyptic writing is obviously closely connected with prophecy; it appears in the Jewish Church after the genuine prophetic succession had ceased. The strictly orthodox Jews seem to have regarded it as a degenerate daughter of prophecy proper, and this fact, together with its late date, militated against the inclusion of most of it in the Old Testament.

But it does just appear in *Ezekiel*, in *Zechariah*, and in the latter part of *Daniel*. After the close of the Canon it developed rapidly, and although it sometimes assumed fantastic forms it served a useful purpose. It kept Faith and Hope alive in times when they might have died, and thereby preserved the foundation upon which our Lord built. If *The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*[1] had meant nothing to those who heard it, it is hard to see in what terms the first preaching of the Gospel could have been couched. The hope which gave to these words the immense significance which they possessed for every pious Jew had been launched into the world by the prophets, and it is largely due to the various apocalyptic writings that it had not evaporated before the time of its consummation came.

Apocalyptics may be called the Stormy Petrel of religion. They belong to times of trouble when power is in the hands of the ungodly and the oppressors, and the cry goes up *Lord how long?* They speak of the time to come when Might shall be no longer Right, and when God will vindicate His suffering saints. And to this fact is very largely due their obscure and cryptic

[1] *Mark* 1[15].

character. Apocalyptic writers look confidently for a complete reversal of the existing state of affairs, which shall result in the triumph of the weak over the strong. But as it appears inconceivable that this should be brought about by any human agency, the hope centres in some new and overwhelming manifestation of divine power. What cannot be compassed by human armies will be brought about by the hosts of heaven. No other way is possible. But as no one can say exactly how or when this will be, the language of the predictions is necessarily vague and mysterious. It owes much to the exuberant fancy of a race which has always shown itself more imaginative than our own. Also prudence forbids plain speaking even if it were possible. It is not wise to let the tyrant of the moment know that you regard his irretrievable ruin as certain at no very distant date. The overthrow of the oppressor and the triumph of God's elect had to be expressed in language which would be intelligible to those whom it was meant to hearten, but would not betray their hopes if it should fall into the hands of the enemy.[1]

The *Apocalypse of S. John* is one of the latest representatives of a long line. A work which is probably approximately contemporary with it is the *Second Book of Esdras*, which has found a place in the canonical Apocrypha. One of the best known of the series is the *Book of Enoch*, which probably did not receive its final touches until after the birth of Christ.

When S. John came to write there was a very definite apocalyptic tradition. That is to say—Custom had prescribed the form which such writing should take. To a considerable extent convention had stereotyped the imagery which could be employed: and on this point opinion seems to have been very conservative.

Thus the *Apocalypse of S. John*, which appears to most English readers in the light of a unique creation, is in reality the least original in form of any book of the New Testament.

In saying this no disparagement whatever is cast upon the inspiration of the author or upon the value of what he wrote,

[1] See further note A at the end of this chapter, *The Number of the Beast.*

any more than we belittle Shakespeare by saying that he did not invent the art of dramatic composition, and that he followed the ordinary stage-conventions of his time. Both statements are facts.

S. John [1] employed a literary vehicle with which Jewish and Jewish-Christian circles were already thoroughly familiar, though it was doubtless strange and puzzling to Gentile readers. He was content to avail himself more than a modern writer would be likely to do of forms of expression which were already in existence. A simple and easy method of estimating his debt to previous writers is afforded by his quotations from the Old Testament.

All the New Testament writers knew the Old Testament well, and drew upon it extensively. But it plays a larger part in the *Apocalypse* than in any other book.[2] S. John plainly chose to borrow language wherewith to express his thoughts, whenever he could, in preference to coining phraseology of his own. It may perhaps surprise us to find that the mind of one who was *in the Spirit* (i.e. as it would seem rapt in a trance) should work in this way. But there can be no doubt as to the fact, and it may throw some light upon the nature of genuine Inspiration. It suggests that when a man is truly inspired by God his normal faculties are not abrogated but heightened, so that his memory becomes exceptionally vivid and accurate and the result of his former studies is present to his mind with peculiar clearness. S. John's style is as far as anything can be from the ravings which have often passed for Inspiration in Christian as well as in pagan circles.

2. The imagery, as is usual in the Bible, is Symbolic rather than Pictorial. That is to say—it is directed to the understanding rather than to the eye. We are not meant to try to visualize the Seer's conceptions. Many of them would

[1] To give the author the name which he claims for himself, and the title which the Church has accorded to him, whether he is to be identified with John the Apostle or not.

[2] In 1,192 lines (WH text) the *Apocalypse* contains 490 distinct quotations from the Old Testament. *Hebrews* contains 99 in 684 lines, and *Romans* 89 in 845 lines. In the *Apocalypse* several Old Testament passages are often combined.

be unintelligible, or downright grotesque, if we tried to reproduce them with pencil and brush. It is not the form of the thing seen, but what it suggests which matters.

One illustration of the principle will be sufficient.[1]

In the vision of God with which Chapter 4 opens we read that *There was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne: and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius.*

In passing it should be noted as a mark of the genuine character of the vision that there is no attempt to describe the Figure in detail. If there were we should know that the author was relying upon his imagination. The Glory of the Godhead must be beyond any detailed description which could be framed in human speech.[2] But what are we to make of the description which is given?

If we believe anything about God we believe that He is a Person: that is to say that His Nature is (*mutatis mutandis*) analogous to our own, though far above it. We are, be it said with all reverence, pale copies of Him. What we are is more like Him than anything else which we can know. It is hard to see how anything which deserves to be called religion could rest upon any conception of God except a personal one. The Bible assumes from beginning to end that God is a Person. If He is not, its only value is literary and antiquarian. From the standpoint of religion it is entirely misleading.

But how can a Person be compared with two precious stones? At first sight the image is unintelligible. But the key to it is to be found in the ideas which precious stones suggested to S. John and to his readers. These are not the same as those which they suggest to us.

In our eyes precious stones are merely articles of luxury. They have no significance beyond their beauty, and we do not take them very seriously. But in the ancient world they were

[1] For a further discussion of it I may perhaps be permitted to refer to my *The Old Testament: Its Meaning and Value for the Church To-day*, pp. 12–20. (Macmillan, 1919.)

[2] Compare S. Paul's refusal to describe exactly what he saw and heard in *the third heaven* (*2 Cor.* 12^{1-4}). The Apostle's reticence contrasts sharply with the descriptions of the spiritual world which come to us through modern *mediums*.

regarded differently. There is a considerable literature relating to them from which it appears that they were taken very seriously indeed. They possessed a semi-religious significance on account of the magical properties with which they were credited. Their beauty was one reason for esteeming them highly, but it was only a secondary one. In S. John's world precious stones were held to be of supernatural efficacy, and this belief was probably based upon their indestructibility. They are the hardest and most enduring things which exist. The lapse of time makes no difference to them, fire leaves them unharmed, and they can only be cut with very great difficulty by any tools of our making.

The first idea which attached to them was therefore permanence, which invested them with exceptional power. This is doubtless why the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem consist each of a single precious stone which stands for one of the Apostles of the Lamb.[1] In S. John's eyes precious stones were the most natural and fitting symbols of the ineffable Presence of the Eternal Father. They suggested the ideas of Eternity, Beauty, and mysterious Power, which could not be represented in any pictorial way. We cannot say why he selected the two which he names. But the principle underlying the choice is clear.

The date and authorship of the book are matters of controversy, and it is unlikely that the question will ever be settled definitely.

It seems certain that the *Apocalypse* did not see the light until the last decade of the first century. The persecution which marked the closing years of Domitian's reign might very naturally have caused it to be written. But certain passages seem to indicate a date nearly thirty years earlier. For example Chapter 11 seems to imply that Jerusalem and the Temple were still in existence. If so it must have been written before the capture and destruction of the city by Titus in A.D. 70.

Also in his reference to *the beast that was and is not* and *is himself also an eighth* in Chapter 17, verse 11, the author must have had in mind the Emperor Nero. He had been dethroned by a revolution, and had met his death in a villa a few miles

[1] Ch. 21^{19-20}.

from Rome on the night of 9th June, A.D. 68. But because he had fled from before Galba and because there had been very few eyewitnesses of his death a belief grew up that he had made his escape good. It was thought that he was not dead, but had taken refuge in Parthia, beyond the Eastern frontier of the Empire. From thence he would return at the head of a horde of the Asiatic horsemen, who had shown themselves to be the most persistent and formidable enemies of Rome, to seat himself again upon the throne from which he had been driven. This belief perhaps appears also in Chapter 16, verse 12, where the Euphrates (which was the frontier of the two Empires) is dried up *that the way might be made ready for the kings which come from the sun-rising.*[1]

In fact more than one pretender appeared. But the pseudo-Neros were unsuccessful, and after a few years the belief died a natural death. But if, as seems to have been the case, it was held by S. John when he wrote those passages it seems to be impossible to date them much after A.D. 70.[2]

It is not, however, necessary to decide definitely between an earlier and a later date, and to say that the Apocalypse must belong in its entirety either to the reign of Nero, or to the reign of Domitian. The visions which it contains may (like the prophecies of Isaiah) have been spread over half a lifetime. Some of them may be as early as 64, and others as late as 96, and it is not unnatural that none of them should have been published until the series was complete. Possibly the book never saw the light until after S. John's death. It has been thought that he died at Chapter 20, verse 3, leaving behind him materials which were edited by a disciple, but not in their proper order.[3]

Undoubtedly the book as we have it now has undergone 'edition' and appears to contain some small interpolations,[4]

[1] cf. also 13³, 12, 14.

[2] It is possible that, as Professor Swete holds, he saw in Domitian a reincarnation of Nero and might therefore have written as he did about the year 95. But that seems to be rather a strained interpretation made in the interest of the later date.

[3] So Canon R. H. Charles (*Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. vii, 1916).

[4] See *Studies in the Apocalypse*, by R. H. Charles. (T. & T. Clark 1913.)

which have been inserted by a not very skilful hand. One of these at least is fairly obvious. In Chapter 8, verse 12, we read *And the fourth angel sounded and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon and the third part of the stars, that the third part of them should be darkened.* That is intelligible. But the rest of the verse runs *And the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner.* This introduces a perfectly different idea. It is one thing to say that a third part of the sun is darkened, and another to say that it should only shine for two-thirds of its normal time. Also it is not clear in what sense the night may be said to *shine,* unless by the word *night* we are to understand *moon* and *stars.*

The concluding words seem to have been added not very intelligently by some one who meant them to be a commentary on, or an explanation of, what immediately preceded them, and did not see that they are in reality nothing of the kind.

If the visions were seen on several different occasions, and written down at the time, and subsequently published as a single book, it is probable that the order in which they stand now is literary rather than strictly chronological.

The author writes under the name of *John.* But whether he is to be identified with John the Apostle, or with John the Evangelist, or with John the Elder [1] is quite uncertain. It would be beside our immediate point to discuss the question at any length here. But this much may be said.

If he were the apostle, the son of Zebedee, we should have expected him so to describe himself; and there are also difficulties in the way of holding that he lived until near the close of the first century.

His knowledge of the churches of Asia is in keeping with what tradition records of the Fourth Evangelist. But considerations of style make it difficult (though not impossible) to maintain that the Apocalypse and the Gospel are by the same hand. This was felt by Dionysius of Alexandria as early as the third century. On the other hand we must admit that we do not

[1] It is doubtful whether the Elder ever had any existence as a separate personage.

know how much to allow for what is described as being *in the Spirit*. The Seer before whose eyes the heavens have been opened might be expected to write in a strain very different from that of the reflective Evangelist who is summing up the experience and meditations of a long lifetime.

But the identity of the author, and the history of the literary vehicle which he employs, are questions of secondary importance only. His book has found a place in the Church's Canon of Scripture, and is the only example of Christian Prophecy which has done so. What concerns us is to consider the light which it throws upon the character and ideals of the Church of the first century. Our object is to see whether, or how far, it agrees with or supplements the very remarkable picture which has been sketched for us in outline in the apostolic letters.

The book is commonly called the *Revelation of S. John*, but that is not the title which it claims for itself. It calls itself the *Revelation of Jesus Christ. John* is only the second intermediary, to whom the revelation has been communicated by an angel. The real author is Christ Himself. It is His message: not that of any man or angel. Thus from the very outset the atmosphere is one of most intimate association with Him.

This tone is maintained throughout. The letters to the Seven Churches are inspired by an immediate vision of Christ. The Figure seen is glorified, until It has almost ceased to be human. Exact description of It is impossible—but It can be recognized. Through all the bewildering, terrifying glory with which It is encircled It is still *like unto a son of man*, and It is no stranger. It declares *I am He which liveth and was dead and behold I am alive for ever more: and I have the keys of death and of Hades.* There is only One to whom such language could be applied with any meaning: only One who by virtue of His death and resurrection holds in His hand all that belongs to life and death.[1]

Those who hold the *testimony* or *faith of Jesus* are a distinct class separate from all others.[2] Jesus has already had his martyrs,[3] and John is writing for those who share with him the *tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus*.[4] In the last chapter the authority of the revelation is reaffirmed. *I Jesus*

[1] 1^{10-18}. [2] 12^{17}, 14^{12}, 19^{10}, 20^{4}. [3] 17^{6}. [4] 19.

have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the Churches,[1] and the book closes with the promise *Yea: I come quickly:* which is answered by *Amen: Come Lord Jesus.*[2]

The immediate, unbroken relationship with Jesus which we have seen to be the foundation of everything with which the apostolic letters deal is equally the root of the whole matter here.

But here the supernatural background upon which the faith of the Church rests, against which its life has to be lived, is if possible even more in evidence than in the earlier books of the New Testament. The lapse of time and pressure of untoward circumstances have neither obscured it, nor thrust it farther away. Rather they have emphasized it. It is hidden from men's eyes only by the thinnest of veils: and the veil may be at any moment withdrawn.

Thus *a door is opened in heaven*[3] and mortal eyes are permitted to see something—as much as they are capable of seeing—of the unwearied activity and worship of the spiritual world. Whether men heed it or not, worship is being ever paid to God, for what He is in Himself, and for the revelation of Himself which He has given through the medium of the created order.[4] In this vision we are shown what may be called the archetype of Life: that is to say, Life at its highest, the pattern and inspiration of what all life ought to be.

The Letters to the Seven Churches stand by themselves and have no real connexion with what follows them. Chapter 4 is really the beginning of the book and is the key to everything which follows. The vision is intended to demonstrate the principle upon which the author proceeds throughout; namely that (to put it crudely) it is only by reference to what is being done in heaven that we can interpret aright what passes before our eyes on earth.

Again and again the lesson is impressed that whatever happens on earth is reflected in the spiritual world: or rather is the outcome of spiritual forces at work there. If there is strife between good and evil upon earth, the same war is being waged upon a vaster scale elsewhere.[5] The true causes of things are not what we commonly see, but are the outcome of spiritual powers.

1 22^{16}. 2 22^{20}. 3 4^{1}. 4 4^{10-11}. 5 12^{7}.

In attempting to describe their nature and operation imagination exhausts itself.[1] But there is a most vivid and intense sense of the reality of what is described.

The outlook of the *Apocalypse* is in some respects wider than that of the Epistles. They are concerned primarily with particular communities or with individuals, though each community and individual is envisaged as forming part of a larger whole. But S. John's eye ranges over the entire world. By this time the Roman government is no longer ignorant of or indifferent to the beliefs and practices of the Christian communities. It has perceived—perhaps half-unconsciously—that their very existence is a challenge to the principle of the Omnipotence of the State, upon which it was coming to lean with ever increasing weight. Therefore it has begun to measure its strength with theirs, and although the final struggle was still more than two hundred years distant, the State has already become for S. John the arch-enemy and the embodiment of all evil. The world is now divided into two camps which are openly and irreconcilably at war with each other.

This is the sombre conception which colours the greater part of the book, and there is nothing in it which need cause us any surprise. It could hardly have been otherwise. But what is amazing is that in S. John's eyes the issue of the conflict is not for one moment in doubt.

On the one side was ranged the Roman Empire with its overwhelming natural resources and unique traditional prestige. Its gods had at least given to Rome the sovereignty of the world, and what more could any man expect of the objects of his worship ?

On the other stood the Christian Church without country, city, wealth, or power. It had less than a hundred years of history behind it, and possessed nothing save what was thoroughly contemptible in the eyes of its opponents. Yet for S. John the struggle has been decided already, and the Church's victory is final and complete.

The imposing Empire is portrayed as riding to its own ruin.[2] Babylon has fallen,[3] and her smoke goes up for ever and ever.[4]

[1] 8, 9, 10[1-4], 16, 18[1], &c. [2] 6[1-9]. [3] 18[2]. [4] 19[3].

The Word of God goes forth at the head of the armies of heaven, to judge and to make war in righteousness. His title is *King of Kings and Lord of Lords.*[1] The victory has been won by what Jesus has done already.

Then, when the earth has been purged, the Holy City is seen descending from heaven. It was not on earth before: it could not have been, because it must needs be a new creation. In it God's plan for the unity of the human race—the conception which S. Paul had emphasized so strongly in *Ephesians*—is fulfilled. The nations walk amidst the light thereof, and the kings of the earth do bring their honour and glory into it. The world is not reduced to one dull level of uniformity, but the varying gifts and traditions of mankind are brought together to form one perfect and harmonious whole. The possibility of sharing in this unity does not depend upon any accident of birth or of circumstances. The only condition of entrance to the Holy City is *moral.*[2]

When we consider the sublime confidence which marks the author's outlook throughout, and the comprehensive loftiness of the crowning vision, we can see for ourselves why the book has been included in the Church's Canon. If such courage in the face of an opposition which, judged by all ordinary standards, must necessarily prove irresistible, if the conviction that, despite all appearances to the contrary, God has in fact triumphed over evil, coupled with a vision of His purpose for mankind as already consummated—if these be not marks of Divine Inspiration then it is impossible to attach any meaning to the phrase. S. John looks upon the world and the course of human history not with purblind mortal eyes, but—it is not too much to say—with the clear vision of God Himself. He sees things not as they ordinarily appear to men, but as they appear to God.

Equally striking is the author's attitude towards the Person of Christ, which is in complete agreement with that adopted by the writers of the Epistles. Not only is Christ alive now, and in intimate communion with His followers, but He is referred to repeatedly as *the Lamb.* The first time this title is applied to Him it is supplemented with the words *as though it had been*

[1] 19^{11-16}. [2] 21^{24-7}.

slain,[1] as if to leave no possible room for doubt as to the significance of the description.

In Jewish religious thought (and it is to be remembered that the *Apocalypse* is cast throughout in a Jewish mould) a lamb stood for one thing only: namely Propitiatory Sacrifice. The centre of the most sacred ordinance of the Jewish Church was the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb at the Passover. It was held that the Lamb's blood had been accepted on the ever-memorable night in Egypt in lieu of the human life which would otherwise have been claimed by the destroying angel.[2]

And in the minor sacrifices which the Law ordained a Lamb was counted the highest victim, and the most acceptable in the sight of God.

In S. John's thought, no less than in that of the epistles, Christ holds a unique place, at the very head and centre of the universe. Power and authority to which none other can lay claim are in His hands. He alone can open the Sealed Book and disclose the destiny which is in store for the world. Human history finds its fulfilment and interpretation through Him alone.[3]

But this He does as *the Lamb*. He has prevailed to open the book, because He has been sacrificed. As *the Lamb which hath been slain* He is *worthy to receive the power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing*.[4] No tribute which can be paid to Him is in excess of His worth. The completeness of His sacrifice is the measure of His triumph, and constitutes Him the *Lion of the tribe of Judah*.

And in Him is the hope of mankind. To the age-long problem of how to get rid of sin He has at length furnished an answer. Men have been *purchased unto God* with His Blood.[5] Those who have made their way to God's Presence through the great tribulation are able to stand before His Throne because they have *washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb*.[6]

Many to-day resent such language, and consider that it belongs to a type of religion cruder than anything which ought to claim our allegiance now. It is not impossible that their

1 5^{6}. 2 *Exod.* 12^{23}. 3 5^{1-8}. 4 5^{12}. 5 5^{9}. 6 7^{14}.

judgement is at fault because no tribulation through which they have ever passed has been sufficiently great to illuminate it. In any case there can be no doubt that S. John is on this point at one with the writers of the epistles. Indeed he is even more emphatic than they. To him as to the rest of the Apostolic Church it is clear that the Death of Christ is more than an inspiring example which points the way by which men may win forgiveness from God, and their own deliverance. It has, once and for all, destroyed sin. It has taken sin away, as washing removes the stains from a garment.

No explanation of the fact is vouchsafed. But if words have any meaning at all there is no question that S. John was convinced that it was a fact, and that it was one of the foundations, if not the chief corner-stone itself, of everything else which he believed and hoped.

The Letters to the Seven Churches stand apart from the rest of the book and have no apparent connexion with it. Their message comes direct from Christ Himself without the aid of an angelic intermediary. But the picture which they give conforms very closely with that which we have already seen drawn in the epistles.

Each is addressed to a community [1] which possesses a corporate life of its own so that it can be treated as a single entity. In each case there has been a failure to maintain the ideals which ought to have marked the common life of the Church, and the individual life of every member of it. All that has passed is fully known to the Son of God, for each letter begins with the words *I know*.

There is no attempt to disguise the deterioration which has taken place. With the exception of Laodicea [2] there is in every case either a warning against intellectual error in matters of belief, or a rebuke for having surrendered to it. Here, as we saw in the Epistles, the life of each Christian community is bound up with its beliefs. Certain beliefs are true, and are to

[1] *The Angel of the Church* is a source of difficulty to commentators. Some have seen in the words a reference to the presiding Bishop. But upon the whole it seems more probable that the thought is of a supernatural guardian, such as the Princes who appear in *Dan.* 10^{20-1}. They are the Guardian Angels of the several nations.

[2] 3^{14-22}.

be held resolutely. All others, however plausible or convenient they may be, are false and are to be rejected. If they are admitted life will deteriorate. To S. John the pressure of the persecution under which he is writing is no excuse for allowing the distinction between Truth and Falsehood to become blurred. And he claims for his message more than human authority.

With the exception of Philadelphia [1] the failure has been grievous in every case, and the rebuke which it calls forth is severe. But it is not beyond repair, and each letter concludes upon a note of hope, with a promise of reward.[2] And for this reason these Seven Letters are perhaps the most encouraging documents to which the Christian reader can turn.

For these Churches had enjoyed very exceptional advantages. One of them—Ephesus—had been founded by S. Paul himself, and might almost count itself the Capital of Christendom. With the possible exception of Rome the apostle had never as far as we know stayed so long in any other place. The other six had all come within the sphere of his influence, if he had never visited them personally. Christian tradition affirms that they had all been directed by the personal supervision of the Fourth Evangelist. No other Christian communities had begun their life under such favourable auspices. Yet now, when they are barely fifty years old, they present, with one exception, a uniform and melancholy picture of failure and decay. If these Churches had come to this so soon what hope could there be for the future of Christianity? How could it possibly survive at all? Much more—How could it ever come to sway and to unite all mankind?

In the eyes of an inspired Prophet Time is a thing of nought and the apocalyptic vision is commonly foreshortened. The consummation to which S. John looked forward, which he could envisage as already complete, is in one sense not yet fully realized. The kingdoms of this world are as yet the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ in a very limited sense only.

[1] 3$^{7-13}$.

[2] Sir W. Ramsay has shown at length how the address of each letter, and the form in which its warnings and promises are couched, is adapted to the peculiar history and circumstances of each place. (*The Letters to the Seven Churches*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1904.)

Human society is not yet purged of all evil: human character is not yet stripped of everything which makes man unlike God. The Holy City, the Church, is not yet the common ground where all nations meet as brethren, to whose glory every people is proud to make its own peculiar contribution.

But the Church which the Seven Letters depict as almost on the verge of dissolution is with us still; and its power in the world was never so great as it is to-day. Eighteen centuries of chequered experience have proved to the hilt the truth of the conviction common to all the apostolic writings that the Church has within itself springs of life which no folly, frailty, or wickedness on our part can ever avail to destroy. And if they have shown themselves to be indestructible it follows that their source is not here, but in some region to which the powers of this world cannot reach.

NOTE A. THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding let him count the number of the Beast: for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and Sixty and Six. 13^{18}.

This passage is one which naturally excites our curiosity. It has been the subject of innumerable conjectures, of varying degrees of reasonableness and ingenuity.

The opening words of the verse show that it is of the nature of a riddle. That is to say, the author has designedly expressed himself in a cryptic way. His meaning would be clear enough to all those who were meant to read his book. But he was saying something which it was not expedient to say quite openly. Therefore, it had to be said in such a way that if a copy of the book should come into the hands of any one for whom it was not intended, no harm would be done. The *Beast* was the arch-enemy of God and of His saints, and his ultimate downfall was therefore certain. But at the moment he was in a position to make his anger felt. Therefore his destruction could not be prophesied without disguise.

The key to the passage lies in the fact that Greek possessed no distinct numerals. The letters of the alphabet served as figures. Alpha (A) was 1, Beta (B) 2, and so on. Therefore any Greek word can be expressed as a number, by adding together the numerical value of the letters which it contains. It is in

fact necessarily a number if we choose to read it so. But what name S. John had in mind is unknown and will probably always remain so. Apparently he was referring to one individual, rather than to any institution, and there is more than one possible name (e.g. Nero Caesar) which can be made to yield the requisite total. We have no means of deciding definitely between the possibilities which naturally occur to us: and there may be many others of which we have no knowledge. The uncertainty is further increased by the fact (noted in the margin of our Revised Version) that some ancient authorities read *616* in place of *666*. In the original Greek the figure is written in words so that the text offers no clue as to the correct reading. We must therefore be content to leave the riddle unsolved, as far as the identification of the Beast with any particular historical character is concerned.

NOTE B. THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew, Har-Magedon. 16^{16}.

Armageddon has passed into common use in English to signify a battle upon a stupendous scale. The word was continually upon our lips during the late war. Yet it is probable that comparatively few people are acquainted with the origin of the word or with the source of the meaning which attaches to it. A short explanation will therefore not be out of place here.

The word *Armageddon* means simply *The Field of Megiddo*, and *Megiddo* is a particular spot upon the soil of Palestine which like Belgium has been marked out by nature to be a battlefield. Any one who is invading the country either from the north or the south (that is to say by either of the two possible routes) is almost certain to be compelled to fight a decisive battle there.[1]

There Deborah and Barak had defeated Sisera (*Judges* 5^{19}), and there Josiah, in the year 610 B.C., had tried in vain to stay the advance of Pharaoh Necho (*2 Chron.* $35^{20\text{-}6}$). Josiah was completely defeated and died of his wounds: and his kingdom became an Egyptian province.[2]

[1] It was on this historic ground that Field-Marshal Lord Allenby finally broke the Turkish armies in Palestine 19 September 1918.

[2] There is a curiously close parallel in our own history in the defeat and death of Eadwine, King of Northumbria, at the battle of Haethfelth on 12 October 633, which ruined Christianity in the North of England. But this disaster was retrieved little more than a year afterwards by Oswald's victory at Heavenfield.

This calamitous day was never forgotten in Israel. Josiah had been the great religious reformer. He had rebuilt the Temple, and purged his kingdom of idolatry. And he was the last ruler of Jewish blood who has ever been able to lay claim to more than the merest shadow of independence. And Egypt was the immemorial enemy of Israel: the very incarnation of every evil power. Therefore the Field of Megiddo was the outstanding instance in Jewish eyes of the triumph of Wrong over Right. Unlike the still more awful catastrophe of the capture of Jerusalem the disaster of Megiddo never was, as a matter of history, repaired in any way. It stood in Jewish annals as a day of blackness, unrelieved by any subsequent success. But Jewish faith became convinced that it must be retrieved eventually. So great a victory of Iniquity could not be allowed to stand for ever by God the Righteous Judge. Therefore it came to be believed that when Messiah should appear and the forces of evil should rally against Him, He would overthrow them in one stupendous battle on the same spot. The enemies of God would be destroyed finally and for ever on the same field where they had raised their head against His people in insolent triumph.

S. John avails himself of the ancient traditional belief as the setting for his message, and therefore places the final struggle between Good and Evil at *the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon.*

NOTE C. THE ABOLITION OF THE SEA

And the sea is no more. 21[1].

We are probably accustomed to read these words as no more than an accompaniment of the *new heaven and the new earth* of S. John's vision. The disappearance of the sea would very naturally be a part of the general winding up of the created order with which we are familiar. As the Jews were not a seafaring people it would be a point on which a writer of Jewish blood might naturally be expected to lay emphasis. And this probability might well be heightened by S. John's personal exile in Patmos. When he was there the sea was an effective barrier between him and his fellow Christians in Asia and elsewhere. Small wonder that he should look eagerly for the day when that barrier should have been destroyed for ever.

But the words meant more than this. For readers of Jewish blood they represent the culmination of a belief which had been the common property of their race for many centuries, and appears in more than one passage in the Old Testament.

Like many other primitive peoples, the Hebrews looked upon the watery element as the source of all evil. Water is always in motion, and therefore in primitive eyes is peculiarly alive and to be feared. It is in actual fact the source of much danger and of many catastrophes. Those who entrust themselves to its stealthy embraces are often seen again no more.

In Hebrew minds Water in general, and the sea in particular, became half-personified as the arch-enemy of God and Man. Sometimes the Deep itself is spoken of as if it were a living creature.[1] But gradually the idea crystallized into a monster living in the sea, like the Juturgand of our own forefathers' mythology.[2] Over this monster God would one day win a final victory.[3] The exact form of the belief varied a little from time to time. Sometimes Egypt (called *Rahab*) was more or less identified with the dragon: as being the arch-enemy of Israel. This identification seems also to have been helped by the existence of the crocodile. As far as the Jews knew the crocodile was peculiar to the Nile. Therefore it stood for Egypt. It might also be regarded as an incarnation of the Dragon. Thus it was an appropriate symbol of Israel's most inveterate foe.[4]

The Exodus and Passage of the Red Sea were perhaps regarded as an earnest of the completer triumph which was yet to come, because they were at once a victory over Egypt and over the Sea itself.

At first the conflict between Jehovah and the Dragon was probably conceived in an entirely materialistic way. Legend asserted (and perhaps asserts still) that the Sons of Abraham would feast upon the monster's flesh when they sat down to banquet for ever in Messiah's kingdom. But gradually in common with many other primitive ideas current among the Hebrews it became spiritualized, and stood for God's war with evil. That is the sense in which S. John employs the ancient myth. When he wrote *the sea is no more* he meant 'God's age-long struggle with evil has ended for ever. He has not merely crushed His adversary, but the source of everything hostile to Him has ceased to exist'.

[1] *Gen.* 49[25]; *Deut.* 33[13].

[2] *Amos* 9[3]. It is to be remembered that *Amos* is one of the earliest books of the Old Testament.

[3] *Isa.* 27[1]: cf. *Ps.* 74[13, 14], 89[9, 10].

[4] cf. *Ezek.* 29[3-10], 32[2-7].

VI

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

With the *Acts of the Apostles* we pass into a very different atmosphere. Hitherto we have been dealing chiefly with letters which, like all other letters, were written in view of some one particular set of circumstances, and were intended originally for a limited circle of readers only.[1] The epistles of the New Testament are necessarily 'occasional' documents, and the authors of them did not imagine that what they had written would come to be regarded as of permanent value by the Church at large. They have come to be so regarded not on account of the historical circumstances which produced them, or of the actual facts which they record, but because they refer all problems of belief and conduct to permanent principles. They lay bare for us the principles by which the first generation of Christians tried to order their lives and solve their difficulties. And the Church believes that the solution of all religious, ethical, and social perplexities can be found by the resolute application of these same principles: and in no other way.

In the *Apocalypse* we have what might be called the spiritual interpretation of current events. And the author's insight into the spiritual forces which are actively at work behind all that we see assures him that the final outcome of human history will be very different from what appears to be superficially probable at the moment of writing. Books of this kind are a peculiar product of Judaism. The spiritual and intellectual attitude of the authors, and the literary vehicle which they

[1] *1 John*, *2 Pet.*, and *Jude* are perhaps exceptions. But if the first of these was written as a covering letter to the Fourth Gospel it was not intended to be read by itself, though it was meant for any into whose hands that Gospel might come. The other two can hardly be counted genuine letters, and are not by the hands of the Apostles whose names they bear. They probably were intended for the whole Christian world.

employ, is the exclusive property of the Jewish race. Europe has never produced anything parallel, and there is therefore no external, independent standard by which *apocalyptic* writings can be judged. We can only take them as we find them. The sole test which we can apply is to consider whether the subsequent course of history has been in any degree conformable with their forecast or no.

That is to say—whether their estimate of the character of the spiritual forces by which the course of history is being shaped has been vindicated by subsequent events. Eighteen centuries or more may reasonably be expected to have put us into a position to form some sort of judgement on this point.

Thus we may apply a simple test to the *Apocalypse of S. John* by asking two questions.

1. Has the Roman Empire gone down in ruins ?

2. Can the Church be said to have triumphed (or even to be in process of triumphing) over the world ?

If the answer to these questions be *Yes*, then the prophetic insight of the author, and the value of what he wrote, have been established as far as any outside test can establish them.

But *Acts* does not profess to be either a letter or a prophecy. It is not even a theological treatise, though it contains several sermons. It professes to be a history, and therefore like all other histories its value must depend very largely upon its accuracy. The author's statements must be tested wherever possible. If, where any test can be applied, they prove to be correct we shall be entitled to regard him as generally trustworthy, and to accept statements the accuracy of which we cannot at the moment prove.

Now *Acts* professes to be a formal treatise,[1] and although the author did not in all probability contemplate that what he was writing would come to rank as Scripture, there can be no doubt that he did intend his book to be of permanent value to the Church. He meant to supply a record of the earliest period of the Church's history which would be of interest to all Christian people, all the world over, for all time.

For this reason a shadow of suspicion falls upon him, from

[1] i.1.

which the writers of the Epistles are free. For he may have written with the deliberate intention of making out some particular point of view. He may have had in his mind a preconceived idea of what the Church ought to have been like, and then have set to work to make a picture in harmony with his own ideas. If so, he presumably omitted some facts which would have told against his theory, and garbled others to make them bear out his views. If he did this then his book is worthless as history. Its only interest is for the light which it throws upon what somebody thought the Church ought to have been like during the years immediately after the Ascension.

Fifty years ago this is how *Acts* was generally regarded. There were very few scholars then who would have dated it before A.D. 150. It was commonly held to be a forgery of the second half of the second century, and its historical value was therefore virtually *nil*. It was written to gloze over the bitter feud between S. Peter and S. Paul, which had split the Church into two hostile camps, and had persisted long after the two protagonists were dead.

This was the view taken by a group of German scholars who are known collectively as the *Tübingen School*. Its probability depends upon the existence of a bitter life-long feud between the two great apostles, which did not end with their death. And there is in reality no ground for thinking that there ever was anything of the kind. We know that S. Peter and S. Paul did differ sharply once, as to the terms upon which Gentiles could be admitted to the Church.[1] It was not unnatural that they should. But a temporary difference of opinion about a new issue, which the march of events had suddenly forced into prominence, is very far removed from a life-long quarrel, which was perpetuated by hostile parties for the next two generations. If the relations between S. Peter and S. Paul were such, neither can be said to have *learned Christ*[2] very well.

In the eyes of our generation, which has had more experience of the inveterate German tendency to lay down a Procrustean bed of theory and then to maim facts until they appear to fit it, the views of the Tübingen School are utterly discredited,

[1] *Gal.* 2^{11-18}. [2] *Eph.* 4^{20}.

and the ascendancy which they once enjoyed has become unintelligible. And our estimate of *Acts* has changed completely in consequence. Hardly anybody except M. Loisy doubts now that it is a genuine piece of first-century history, and that it was written by a travelling companion of S. Paul. The passages where the narrative drops into the first person [1] are to be regarded as extracts from a diary which he kept. There can be no question that *Acts* is by the same hand as the Third Gospel; and there is no reason to doubt the unvarying tradition which ascribes both to Luke, and identifies him with *the beloved physician* who was with S. Paul when he was writing *Colossians*,[2] and at one period during the last few months of the apostle's life was his only companion.[3]

We know that S. Paul's health was not robust, and it is therefore tempting to conjecture that the origin of this acquaintance lay in the fact that S. Luke was called in to attend him professionally during his Second Missionary Journey, and that the relationship of Doctor and Patient ripened into that of Disciple and Master. It has also been held that S. Luke was the *man of Macedonia*,[4] whose appearance to S. Paul in a dream drew the apostle from Asia to Europe: and this idea is borne out by the fact that at this point the narrative drops into the first person for the first time. But these suggestions are merely plausible conjectures.

If we hold that S. Luke was the author of *Acts* it is obvious that the earlier chapters deal with events of which neither he nor S. Paul could have possessed any first-hand knowledge. But we know of one occasion on which he had an opportunity of gathering the information about the beginnings of the Christian Society which he required from those who were in a position to supply it. That was during the visit which he paid to Jerusalem in company with S. Paul.[5] This visit may be dated at the end of May A.D. 57. It would also have afforded him an opportunity of making the inquiries which were necessary before he could write his Gospel. And we cannot say positively that he never was at Jerusalem after this date.

1 16^{10-18}, 20^{5}–21^{17}, 27^{1}–28^{16}. 2 *Col.* 4^{14}.
3 *2 Tim.* 4^{11}. 4 *Acts* 16^{9}. 5 *Acts* 21^{15-19}.

It has been said that *Acts* is beyond question a 'genuine piece of first-century history'. But the fact that it is genuine (i.e. that it was really written when it professes to have been written) does not establish its accuracy. Its genuineness merely means that it may be accurate, and does not prove that it is so.

A man may really have taken part in the events which he describes, and yet his account of them may be very misleading. He may be a careless or inaccurate observer: or (which is perhaps even worse) he may have very little power of distinguishing between what is important and what is trivial. In that case he will ignore or minimize great events, and will devote an undue amount of space to small ones. And then his readers, who have no knowledge of their own by which to correct the picture he has drawn, will form a very erroneous impression of what actually occurred.

It is obvious that S. Luke had a taste for detail. He repeatedly introduces an element of precision into his story, which, while it adds something of interest to the narrative, cannot be considered necessary. And the presence of such details (unless they could be shown to be false) suggests at once that he was a careful and painstaking writer.

For instance: in the account of the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, it is stated that *his feet and ankle-bones received strength*,[1] whereas his lameness might have been in the hip or in the knee. And it is also noted that he was *above forty years old*.[2]

Other illustrations of the same precision are the mention of the number of people on board the ship,[3] and of the name of the wind.[4] Also, the note of dysentery as forming part of Publius's father's malady.[5] A less careful writer would probably have contented himself with saying that he had a fever. The scene of the shipwreck is carefully described, and is said to be perfectly recognizable now.

The first impression therefore which *Acts* produces upon the mind of the reader is that the author was a keen observer, and made a point of recording details which he might have ignored or overlooked. The question then arises: Are we in a position to check his statements at any point?

[1] 3[7]. [2] 4[22]. [3] 27[37]. [4] 27[14]. [5] 28.[8]

Now *Acts* is precisely the kind of book which does lend itself to being checked by outside evidence. It does so to a greater extent than any other part of the New Testament. It may be impossible to find any test to apply to the events related in the first twelve chapters. But the remaining sixteen profess to be principally a narrative of travels in Asia Minor and in Greece. These journeyings profess to have been made about the middle of the first century, and are described with considerable wealth of detail.

We know a great deal about the condition of Asia Minor and of Greece at this time, and the spade adds to our knowledge every year. We may therefore reasonably hope to find in S. Luke's narrative some statements whose accuracy we are now in a position to test. And if we find that what he has said proves to be strictly correct we may without misgiving accept his story as likely to be generally trustworthy throughout. If where his statements can be tested he is proved to be right we are entitled to accept other statements which we are not yet (and may never be) in a position to check.

Conversely, if he could be proved to be wrong in such details, suspicion would be thrown upon the book from beginning to end.

Now there are two respects in which statements made by S. Luke have been very remarkably attested by recent discovery. One of them relates to a point which is in itself trivial: the other is of real importance.

1. In Chapter 16, verse 6, we read *And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Ghost to speak the word in Asia.*

This passage was for a long time a source of perplexity to all commentators. *Galatia* was the name given to a very large tract of country extending across the middle of Asia Minor. On the north it almost touched the Black Sea, and its southern frontier was not very far from the Mediterranean.

It was for the most part hilly, and very thinly populated. It was therefore hard to understand why S. Paul should have made it the object of a special expedition. His general policy was plainly in accordance with the obvious dictates of common sense, namely to visit the great centres of population, and to

follow the line of the great trade routes. This would enable him to travel as easily and as expeditiously as possible: and the great cities, which were centres of vigorous intellectual life, afforded the most promising soil for his message.[1] Why on this one occasion did he abandon his usual practice and spend time and energy upon an expedition into the rural heart of Asia Minor, where he would probably have found himself unable to communicate with the inhabitants except through an interpreter, and where in any case only the slenderest results could be expected?

Also: How had it come about that no details of this expedition had been preserved?

To these two queries there was no satisfactory answer. And the statement which provoked them was therefore regarded with suspicion. It was held that the second century forger who had produced *Acts*, not before A.D. 150, had here 'given himself away' badly. In his own day Christianity was widely diffused throughout Asia Minor generally.[2] How it had spread he did not know: but as he was anxious to give to S. Paul the credit of it all he ascribed to him a journey which in fact he never undertook. Therefore it became doubtful how much credence, if any, was to be attached to any other part of his story.

But it has now come to our knowledge that *the Phrygo-Galatic region* was the technical term for a tract of country lying at the southern and south-western extremity of Galatia proper. That fits exactly with the route S. Paul is represented as taking —Derbe–Lystra–Iconium–Antioch. No more accurate description of the area traversed could have been given, and it is unlikely

[1] The fact that the Latin word *paganus*, from which our *pagan* is derived, means a countryman, may illustrate the extent to which the towns became early strongholds of Christianity. But Professor Harnack questions this. He holds that *paganus* was a technical term for *a civilian*, and so meant one who had not been enrolled in Christ's army. Also that it was not until after 360 A.D. in the east that heathenism was driven from the towns so completely as to make *pagan* equivalent to *countryman* (*Mission u. Ausbreitung des Christentums*, p. 298; *Militia Christi*, p. 68. He quotes Tertullian, *De Cor. Militis*, c. 11). I am indebted to the Bishop of Ripon for these references.

[2] cf. Pliny's well-known letter to Trajan, which may be dated about A.D. 110.

that the technical phraseology would have been familiar to any one who did not possess first-hand knowledge of the locality.

There is a curiously close parallel in England in *The Parts of Holland*. This might be taken as a vague way of referring to the Low Countries, and might perplex us considerably if we found it occurring in the account of a journey through England. It might make us inclined to dismiss the whole story as a piece of clumsy fiction. But as a matter of fact it is the correct description of an exactly defined area, forming part of the county of Lincoln.[1] This is hardly a matter of common knowledge, and might very well be unknown to some one who knew a good deal about England generally. But if in an account of a journey in England we found it stated that the travellers passed through *The Parts of Holland* we should be justified in concluding that the writer's topographical knowledge was rather unusually good, and that he had taken pains to express himself accurately. We should then attach more weight to his statements generally than we should have been disposed to do if he had contented himself with saying *They went through part of the Eastern Counties*.

2. In the account of what happened at Thessalonica the magistrates are given the very unusual title of *Politarchs*, which is translated *Rulers of the City* in the English Versions. Now *Rulers of the City*[2] is a general term, which might be applied to any body of magistrates anywhere. It is exactly the kind of phrase which a writer who did not want to put himself to more trouble than he could help would be likely to coin. If he were really writing the best part of a century after the date at which he professed to be writing, and if he had never been at Thessalonica, it would be a very safe way of expressing himself. No suspiciously critical reader of his book could find fault with it. But any attempt to be more technical would be likely to betray the forger.

But it has now come to our knowledge that *Politarchs* was in fact the title borne by the magistrates of Thessalonica (and apparently by no others) about the middle of the first century. It is very unlikely that this would have been known to any one

[1] The other two being *The Parts of Lindsey* and *The Parts of Kesteven*.
[2] *Acts* 17^{8}.

who had not actually visited Thessalonica about that time: and an unobservant traveller might easily have overlooked it. The point is in itself a technical detail of no importance. But its value to us is that it confirms our impression that the author of *Acts* did really take part in the events which he describes, or at least consorted with those who had done so, and that he was a careful observer, who took pains to get his detail accurate.

Again it may be worth while to cite an analogy from our own history.

Westminster Abbey has been for nearly a thousand years a very great Church. Once only in its long history has a Bishop been imposed upon it. Dr. Thomas Thirlby was Bishop of Westminster from 1540–50. He was then translated to Norwich and the See ceased to exist. This fact is probably not very widely known. It would certainly be possible to know a good deal about the history of the Church of England without being aware of it.

Now if in the course of a history of Church matters, which professed to have been written about the middle of the sixteenth century, we came upon a reference to the Bishop of Westminster, we should at first be disposed to think that the author had made a mistake. We might conclude hastily either that he really meant the Bishop of London, or, which would be worse still, that he imagined that any great Church must needs be a Cathedral and possess a Bishop. In either case we should say that his equipment for the task of writing history was slender, and we should look with suspicion on many of his other statements. But if he were dealing with the years 1540–50 he would in fact be right, because there really was a Bishop of Westminster then. And thus the statement which at first seemed to discredit him would in fact go a considerable way towards establishing his reputation as a historian. We should be disposed to trust his other statements, however surprising they might appear at first sight.

No book has gained more from the researches of scholars during the last forty years than has *Acts*. Its traditional character has been completely vindicated. In fact it probably stands higher now than it has ever done before.

For we recognize now that it is not only a genuine narrative : but that the author's scrupulous accuracy, his eye for the essential as opposed to the merely obvious, and his power of conveying exactly what he wishes his readers to grasp in a few deft touches,[1] without wasting a single word, entitle *the beloved physician* to a place amongst the great historians of the world.

The title by which the book is generally known to us, *The Acts of the Apostles*, is in reality slightly misleading. For it suggests at once a more or less complete record of all the doings of all the Apostles during the period covered. But the book is not, and does not profess to be, anything of the kind. The greater part of it is occupied with the doings of S. Peter and S. Paul. There are two references to S. John,[2] and the death of S. James is noted.[3] But of the other apostles we hear nothing after the election of Matthias. The other figures which come into the story are not members of the Twelve.

The correct version of the title is *Acts of Apostles*, and this indicates the true character of the book. It is not a complete history, but a series of carefully selected episodes which have been woven into a connected whole. They have presumably been chosen from a much larger number which might have been chronicled, because the author thought that they were the ones best suited to the purpose which he had in view. If he made selections from a much larger mass of available material, it follows that he was not trying to put down everything which he knew for the sake of gratifying the curiosity of posterity. He must have been writing with some definite object ;[4] and what concerns us is to discover if we can what that object was. If we can do so we shall understand *Acts* much better and our appreciation of its merits will be enhanced. Fortunately S. Luke has

[1] cf. the description of Stephen *full of grace and power*, 6^8, of Elymas *sorcerer, false prophet, Jew*, 13^6, &c. Such mastery of brief, incisive phrase recalls the very best of Tacitus. [2] 3^1–4^{22}, 8^{14}. [3] 12^2.

[4] The Tübingen School recognized this much when they credited him with having aimed at reconciling the 'Petrine' and 'Pauline' parties in the Church about A.D. 150. It is not easy to see how or why *Acts* should have accomplished this, but as the parties certainly disappeared the supporters of the theory were bound to assume that the author had succeeded in his object. It is simpler to hold that no such reconciliation was required because there was no lasting quarrel, and that the schism cannot be traced in later times because it never existed.

discharged his task so well that it is easy for us to see what he had in mind when he began to write. His purpose is to sketch the evolution of the Church from a Jewish sect to an international institution whose claims and outlook are alike world-wide.

That is, as we have seen, what the Church of the Epistles actually was. But there is a very wide difference between that and what the Founder of Christianity had left behind Him. So wide is the difference that some have even held that the Church of history is in reality the creation of S. Paul; and that the development, for which he was undoubtedly largely responsible, was not in accordance with the intention of Christ.

Acts bridges the gap between what the story told in the Gospel might have led us to expect and what the apostolic letters show us had come to be before the first century had run its course. The development is perhaps more rapid than we should have expected. But *Acts* shows us that it was a real development: that is to say, there was never any breach of continuity with the past. Each fresh step had become perfectly natural by the time it was taken. It was felt by those who took it to be the expression of principles which had in reality been implicit in the Gospel from the very beginning, though at first they had been overlooked or only imperfectly grasped. *Acts* describes how, and to a limited extent explains why, the Church of the Epistles—that is to say the Catholic Church of history—was born.

The book begins by retelling the story of the Ascension with more detail than is to be found in either S. Mark's [1] or S. Luke's Gospel. This repetition is deliberate, and serves first to show the continuity between what has gone before and what is to come, and secondly to emphasize the supernatural background of the whole story. Jesus is continuing to act and to teach, though not in the old way, and His return is to be expected. But immediately before His Ascension the horizon of His followers is still narrowly Jewish. They are still looking for a restoration of the kingdom of Israel: [2] that is for the political

[1] The last twelve verses of our *S. Mark* are not part of the original Gospel. But they represent an early Christian tradition, and thus reveal the same belief in the Ascension which underlies many passages in the Epistles. They show that it was part of the Church's original inheritance.

[2] 1[6].

emancipation of their own race, and apparently for nothing more. Indirectly this might be for the benefit of mankind at large: but that would be merely incidental. In the eyes of the apostles Israel alone—not the entire world—is still the point to which the Divine Intention is directed.

The Church begins as a small, and (be it said with all reverence) self-centred community of Jews at Jerusalem. Admittedly the apostles knew that their work was to preach Christ. But they still conceived their mission as at least primarily, if not exclusively, to their own countrymen.

The events of the day of Pentecost [1] attracted a fresh measure of attention to the Christian Community, and led to a large accession of numbers. But the new members were all necessarily Jews; and apparently Jews whose permanent home was at Jerusalem. The foreign Jews who had come up to keep the Feast might have been expected to have been most deeply impressed by the occurrences of the day. But we are not told what attitude they finally adopted towards them: and it is not implied that when they returned to their homes they were in any sense Christian missionaries.

But the Christian Society is still, as it were, a Church within a Church. Those who joined it were all Jews by race and by religion alike. Plainly they did not consider that they were forsaking the religion of their fathers. The priests who became Christians did not relinquish their duties in the Temple.[2] During these years the only difference between Jew and Christian of which either was conscious lay first in the fact that the Christian was baptized as well as circumcised, and that beside the worship of the Temple or synagogue he had his own meetings for the *breaking of the bread*: and secondly that the Christian knew more about Messiah. Both were expecting Messiah to reveal Himself in power and to take His kingdom. But the Christian knew who He would be when He did so, because He had already revealed Himself in Person though not in function, whereas the Jew did not.

During this period the Church came into collision with the

[1] 2^{1-13}. For a discussion of what took place see Note A at the end of this Chapter.

[2] 67.

authorities twice: the occasion in each case being a miracle of healing, which naturally stirred popular feeling. The miracle was followed in each case by teaching about Jesus which reflected upon the character of those who had put Him to death. This could not be overlooked, so on the first occasion [1] S. Peter and S. John were ordered to desist: on the second [2] S. Peter and the apostles were first imprisoned and then beaten.

By this time the Church had become an institution possessing property, and had been compelled to undertake the maintenance of its poorer members.[3] Jerusalem was always a poor city, as its position prevented it from being an important centre of commerce, and it is possible that the hostility of the Jews made it impossible for Christians in the humbler walks of life to find employment. But whatever the cause, the relief-work which had to be undertaken soon became so considerable that an important step had to be taken in order to deal with it. A new official rank, that of *deacons*, was created.[4] The innovation was brought about entirely naturally by the march of events. It proved so great and immediate a success that it was reproduced elsewhere, wherever it was required, and soon became a permanent feature of the Church's life.

This new departure soon led to a collision with authority upon a more serious scale. Stephen was arrested, and became the first Christian martyr. A systematic persecution of all Christians (in place of mere attempts to silence the leaders) ensued: which had the effect of furthering the spread of the teaching which it was intended to extinguish.[5]

The Gospel was now carried to the half-Jews of Samaria, to Joppa, and even as far afield as Damascus, but it was still a Jewish thing. It was preached by Jews to men of their own race (or at least of their own religion) only, in a way which would be unintelligible to any one who had not been brought up on the Old Testament.

A 'chance meeting' [6] sent a Christian to Ethiopia. But he had already embraced the Jewish religion and was familiar with the Scriptures. We know no more of his history: but there is no evidence that he made any converts in his own land.

1 4^{18}. 2 5^{40} 3 2^{45}, 4^{32-7}. 4 6^{1-6}. 5 8. 6 8^{26-40}.

The Church is still a reformed variety of Judaism, and its leaders have not yet contemplated as a possibility that it should ever become anything else. The belief that Messiah's revelation of Himself in power was imminent, and that that would mean the winding-up of the existing order, necessarily tended to keep their horizon narrow. The Church might easily, as far as we can see, have remained a Jewish sect :[1] in which case, if it existed at all to-day, few people would ever have heard of it. The history of Europe for the last sixteen hundred years would then have been very different.

But Chapter 10 opens a new phase in the story. When S. Peter said to Cornelius *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons : but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him*,[2] the words must be reckoned among the most momentous which have ever been spoken. For they are a frank confession by a Jew that the immemorial and exclusive privileges of the sons of Abraham, in which he had been taught to believe with an intensity more passionate than anything which we can readily understand, were now at length no more. The new Israel depended upon moral worth : not upon the accident of birth. It was clear that henceforth Gentile and Jew ranked together in the sight of God. That meant that the whole theory upon which the Jewish religion had rested was gone. The Church was no longer a Jewish sect : it was open to, and intended for, the entire world.

It is not surprising that S. Peter was afterwards frightened by his own boldness and withdrew for a time from the position which he had taken up.[3] But the step never could be retraced. With his words to Cornelius the true destiny of the Christian Church leapt into view. The rest of *Acts* is occupied with showing us how that destiny expanded and began to be fulfilled.

The story of the vision which enabled S. Peter to rise to this new height by showing him that distinctions which he had been accustomed to regard as permanent and unalterable were now no more is familiar to every one. But there is a significance in the setting which is perhaps sometimes overlooked.

S. Peter was at Joppa, the only port of Palestine, on the roof

[1] cf. 11^{19}. [2] $10^{34,35}$. [3] *Gal.* $2^{11,12}$.

of a house by the seaside. Before him stretched the Great Sea, which was the highway to the unknown Gentile world. Beyond it lay the lands and isles of the Greeks whose speech had become for him almost a second mother-tongue. Beyond them lay the great Imperial City of which he was himself a subject, whose power was continually in evidence before his eyes. Beyond that again lay Tarshish whose silver had helped to clothe Solomon with the splendour which had become a legend: and beyond Tarshish who could say?

At his feet ships were clearing for lands which he had never seen, or making harbour heavy with the produce of an unknown world.

We can well imagine that on the roof of the tanner's house new thoughts began to rise in his mind. Was the exclusiveness of which he had been so proud really God's will for all time? Was all but a tiny fraction of this vast and wonderful world, with all its varied peoples, really outside God's care and mercy and therefore doomed to irretrievable ruin? Long ago Amos had said that Jacob was small. Could he alone be everything in the sight of God?

Like doubts may well have assailed Saul as he rode to Damascus. Were men who could die as S. Stephen had died really dangerous fanatics who had believed a lie? Or was it he who after all was in reality sinning against the light?

For both an answer to their questionings came from heaven: and their response to the Divine Call changed the course of history.

The step which S. Peter took when he crossed the threshold of Cornelius's[1] house was so bold and so far-reaching that it was only accepted with difficulty by the rest of the Christian Community. There is a grudging tone about the admission of Chapter 11, verse 18, which it is difficult to reproduce satis-

[1] In view of the attempt which is sometimes made to father the extreme vagaries of humanitarian sentiment upon Christianity it is worth while to note that Cornelius was a professional soldier, and was not required to abandon his calling.

Similarly the story of Ananias and Sapphira is a stumbling-block only to those in whom sentiment overrides conscience, so that their estimate of the value of physical life is above, and of the value of sincerity below, the Christian standard.

factorily in English. We might express it by translating—*Well—then—we suppose that even to the Gentiles hath God granted repentance unto life.*

But though the first great point—that Gentiles could be admitted to the Church—had been established, a further question remained: Upon what terms could they be admitted? And this was not settled without a long and bitter struggle which (as we have seen) finds an echo in more than one of S. Paul's epistles.

In the opinion of many they could be admitted only through the Jewish door. Whatever his antecedents no man could come within the range of Christ's Redemptive Work unless he were first circumcized and kept the Law of Moses. It was not unnatural that this view should have been widely held, as it would have gone far to shore up the tottering privileges of those who were Jews by right of birth. But it would have been fatal to the Church. It would have kept the Church at least semi-Jewish in tone and outlook for ever. And if such a Church could have survived the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple, only an inconsiderable number of Gentiles could ever have found themselves really at home there.

The first formal Council of the Church which was ever held met to decide this point. No ecclesiastical assembly which has met since has had to deal with a matter of more importance. It is not too much to say that the whole future of Christianity depended upon the judgement pronounced by James.[1] Yet in spite of the unquestionable authority of the Council the opposition was too strong to surrender immediately.[2]

From the beginning of Chapter 13 the figure of S. Paul dominates the scene.

We are given a sketch of his three great expeditions to carry

1. 15^{19-21}. The two last prohibitions are rejected by some critics on the ground that they belong to the sphere of ritual and are of minor importance compared with the first. But might they not be concessions to Jewish prejudice which Gentiles might fairly be asked to make, as they did not affect the essential character of Christianity? Jew and Gentile had to live together as Christians: which demanded much of both.

2. Assuming that *Galatians* was not written until after the Council. Professor C. H. Turner thinks that it may have been written before, in which case it is the earliest Christian writing which we possess. (*The Study of the New Testament 1883–1920*, Clarendon Press, 1920.)

the Gospel to the Gentiles. He acted boldly upon the principle which S. Peter had admitted, and although he generally addressed himself first to the Jews in every place which he visited, he recognized from the outset that the Gentiles possessed equal rights in Christ. Sometimes the Jews gave him a friendly hearing, but more often they opposed him bitterly, until he was compelled to say—*It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*[1]

We cannot hope to understand quite how much it must have cost a man, who, years afterwards, was not ashamed to call himself a Pharisee, to speak in this strain to those who were his brethren according to the flesh. No greater renunciation could have been demanded of him. Yet he was able to make it because it was a natural and legitimate outcome of the principle which he had already grasped. The New Israel was for the whole world without distinction of race. The conditions for admission to it were ethical only. Therefore if those who were not Jews showed themselves to be morally superior to the sons of Abraham priority of place must needs pass to them. S. Paul could not recognize this without a pang.[2] But he did recognize it, and never doubted that he had been right to do so.

And from this point onwards his conception of the Church's mission widened. When he started upon his first journey he did not (perhaps) contemplate more than the winning of a few Gentiles here and there. He then believed that our Lord's Second Coming would not be long delayed. Therefore the time was short and few could be won. But as he went on a larger ideal took shape in his mind. He conceived the possibility (though he cannot have expected to live to see his dream realized) of making Christianity the religion of the Empire: in other words of winning the world. And what may be called his 'missionary policy' was moulded by this ideal.

His second journey took him to Athens, which enjoyed an entirely unique prestige[3] and was still the intellectual capital

[1] 13[46].

[2] cf. *Rom.* 9[1-13].

[3] The prestige of Rome and of Jerusalem was of a different kind, and rested on different foundations.

of the world. He also went to Corinth, the gateway between the East and the West, where the academic subtlety of Athens was replaced by the stir and bustle of a prosperous cosmopolitan port.

It was a great thing to have broken ground in Europe, and to have preached the Gospel in the most important centres of the Greek world. But this was not enough. He saw now that his task would not have been accomplished until he had at least visited the Imperial City [1] whose almost superhuman power and glory were fast becoming a legend to millions and were destined to be a real force in Europe long after they had ceased to be more than a name.

His enemies were able to prevent the fulfilment of his purpose for a full two years,[2] and he would probably have died in prison at Caesarea if he had not claimed his right as a Roman citizen, and thereby forced Festus's hand.[3]

When S. Paul entered Rome it was as a prisoner who had nearly lost his life by shipwreck on the way. But he had reached the City (where there were already Christians) and there the story leaves him.

It seems probable that S. Luke intended to write a third book which would have contained the account of the apostle's first trial and acquittal, of his subsequent journeyings, of his second trial and death. One anonymous early tradition declares that the book was actually written and that it also contained an account of the death of S. Peter.[4] But it has vanished so completely that we are probably right in concluding that it never existed.

But although the close of *Acts* leaves us in ignorance of much which we should like to know, yet when S. Luke laid down his pen he had completed his immediate task. His sketch of the evolution of the Church from a Jewish sect to an institution world-wide in outlook and (in a limited sense) world-wide in actual fact was now complete. With S. Paul at Rome the international character of the Christian Gospel was established beyond question. It could never shrink to being in any sense

[1] 19^{21}. [2] 24^{27}. [3] 25^{11-12}.
[4] The *Muratorian Fragment*: see Chapter II, p. 46.

a local thing again. It had found a permanent lodging in the City which was above all nations : henceforth no race or region could claim it as their own.

The lines of its future growth had now been well and truly laid. It ' only ' remained for the Church to rise to the height of the great destiny which God had foreordained. The Divine plan which might otherwise have failed of fruition had been driven into men's minds and brought to the possibility of fulfilment by the wide vision, undaunted courage, and unwearying activity of the inspired Apostle of the Gentiles, which had brought him at length to the Capital of the world.

But the useful word *evolution* does not explain anything in the sphere of religion any more than it does in the sphere of biology. It is not, and does not profess to be more than the description of a process. It tells us what has happened and describes the steps by which it came about. It calls our attention to stages in the process which we might easily have overlooked. But it does not answer the question—*Why did this come about?* Evolution in itself says nothing as to the source or nature of the motive power which has produced the results which are tabulated for our information.

But S. Luke does not leave us in any doubt as to the nature of the motive power nor where it lay. He does not content himself with merely describing the sequence of events. If he did, he would perhaps have to forego his title to be counted *Inspired*, and his book would certainly be very unsatisfactory reading. It would raise quite as many questions as it answered. For if his story be true—and in the light of the apostolic epistles it is impossible to discount it entirely—how are we to account for an evolution so rapid and so far-reaching ? History presents us with no parallel, nor with anything else even approximately analogous.

There is no other instance known to us in which immemorial racial and religious prejudices, whose inveterate character had been notorious to all the world for many centuries, were discarded so rapidly and so thoroughly that in less than thirty-five years a local sect had become an international institution, and had attained a position which it has developed steadily ever since.

The history of the Church in its earliest days might have been sketched in such a way as to leave us with a perfectly insoluble problem. But S. Luke relieves us of our perplexity by showing plainly that (as we saw was the case with the Epistles) at every point the motive power behind the phenomena is a supernatural one. The story is astonishing: but the subsequent course of history compels us to believe it. And it becomes perfectly intelligible when it is presented to us in S. Luke's way, as the outcome of the impact upon a small body of men of a new and inexhaustible supernatural power. No other explanation is even conceivable. The one which is given is entirely adequate.

The presentation of this power is not identical at all points with that which has met us in the Epistles and in the *Revelation*. There it has one centre only: here it may be said to possess two *foci*: which means that we can learn certain truths more fully from *Acts* than from any other book which has as yet come under our notice.

The Person and work of the Holy Spirit are not of course ignored in the Apostolic Letters (e.g. *Romans* 8^{26-7}) but they are less prominent than in *Acts*. *Acts* has sometimes been described with justice as *A Gospel of the Holy Spirit*. Each new departure is definitely initiated by Him, and the actors are, as it were, borne along to new goals, which they had never envisaged before, on a flood of triumphant spiritual power.

The first great step forward which was taken by the infant Church was the direct outcome of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.[1] The gift of the Holy Spirit is promised by S. Peter to those who repent of their sins and are baptized into the Church:[2] and the gift is in fact bestowed in other instances by the laying on of the apostles' hands after Baptism.[3] On two occasions, beside the Day of Pentecost, the gift is accompanied by *speaking with tongues*.[4] This does not seem to have occurred invariably: but whatever the exact visible outcome of the gift may have been, its effect was sufficiently conspicuous for a professional magician to think that the power of bestowing it would be

[1] 24. [2] 2^{38}. [3] 8^{14-19}. 19^{6}.

[4] 10^{46}, 19^{6}. In the case of Cornelius the gift appears to have preceded any laying on of hands.

a valuable addition to his own stock-in-trade.[1] S. Peter,[2] S. Stephen,[3] S. Barnabas,[4] and S. Paul [5] are all described as being *full of the Holy Ghost*, and the outcome of the endowment is manifested in the exceptional courage, insight, and power of incisive speech displayed by its possessors.

Yet the Holy Spirit is not represented as an impersonal force. It is not merely a name for the unaccountable impulses with which men are sometimes seized. Such impulses are a matter of common experience, and men have sometimes been spurred by them to great and noble achievements, to which they could not otherwise have risen. But we also know that such impulses are sometimes foolish or worse.

The Holy Spirit's action is mysterious and incalculable. Its symbols are Wind and Fire. But He is represented quite definitely as a person. It is possible to lie to Him. We do so whenever we try to obtain more credit than we deserve, or pose as being more religious than we really are.[6] It was by His Personal direction that S. Paul and S. Barnabas took the step which was to turn the history of the world into a new channel.[7] The momentous decision of the Council of Jerusalem, upon which hung the outcome of S. Paul's past and the prospect of his future work, proceeds from Him no less than from the assembled brethren.[8] And His interposition constrains S. Paul to change the route which he had planned to follow.[9]

It cannot be said that *Acts* gives us a complete and definite doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is not to be expected that it should, because the book does not profess to be a theological treatise. It is, as has been said above, a series of historical sketches intended to exhibit the successive stages of the evolution of the Church from a Jewish sect at Jerusalem to a world-wide institution.

But the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit are assumed throughout in a way which would have been unintelligible if belief in Him did not exist already amongst the readers whom S. Luke contemplated. It is obvious that he is not introducing

1 8^{18-19}. 2 4^{8}. 3 6^{5}. 4 11^{24}. 5 13^{9}.
6 5^{3}. 7 13^{2-4}. 8 15^{28}. 9 16^{6-8}.

any new element into Christian belief: but that he is illustrating the operation of what was a matter of general belief already.

In S. Luke's eyes, and in those of the Church at the very outset of its history, the Person who inspired the Scriptures of old [1] is alive and at work still, inspiring, guiding, and sustaining the corporate life of the Christian Community and the life of each individual member of it. No man can forecast the method of His manifestation of Himself: no man can predict how or when He will speak. But He acts in a way which cannot be doubted, and He speaks with a voice which men can hear. And His Voice is none other than the Voice of God.

But even so we have not quite reached the root of the matter. The active presence of the Holy Spirit explains why, especially at certain momentous crises, events took the course which they did. It also accounts for the astonishing, and in the strict sense of the word, supernatural, spiritual power and insight displayed by the principal actors in the story. But it does not explain why the Church should ever have existed, nor what was the real goal at which it aimed. But S. Luke leaves no room for doubt on these points either. From beginning to end the story is dominated by the Figure of Jesus.

It opens with the account of His Ascension into heaven and with the promise of His return.[2] The condition which has to be satisfied by the new apostle, who is to take the place of Judas, is that he must possess the same first-hand personal knowledge of Jesus as was possessed by the original eleven.[3] And the unvarying burden of the apostolic preaching is that Jesus has died and has been raised again from the dead by God. This shows that He is the Figure to whom the Scriptures point, for whom every Jew was bound to look, and that His claim upon the loyalty and devotion of all men is therefore unlimited.[4] The apostles' conception of their office was primarily that they were witnesses of His resurrection: [5] that is to say—that they knew of their own knowledge that having been dead He was now alive. This was the foundation upon which everything else rested. The outcome of it soon proved to be more far-reaching than had at first been understood. But while the

[1] 4^{25}, 7^{51}. [2] 1^{9-11}. [3] 1^{21-2}. [4] e.g. 2^{22-36}, 13^{23-41}. [5] e.g. 4^{33}.

ultimate significance of the Life and Death of Christ grew and grew in the apostles' minds (as it still grows in the consciousness of the Church to-day) the original fact admitted of no doubt or qualification. It was there from the very beginning as the impregnable rock upon which everything else was reared.

The original gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was expected on the strength of a promise which had been renewed by Jesus after His resurrection.[1]

Jesus who was dead and is now alive is the centre round which the whole story revolves.

The earliest Christian preaching was welcomed by some who heard it. By others it was rejected with anger or contempt. But there was no possible room for doubt as to its tenor. S. Peter and S. John were forbidden to teach in His name: and when they persisted in doing so, were charged with trying to bring about that the rulers of their nation should be regarded as murderers.[2]

S. Stephen was accused of having said that *Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.*[3]

The first impression produced by S. Paul upon his audience at Athens was that he was preaching *Jesus and the resurrection.*[4] And all that Festus could make of the charges brought against S. Paul by the Jews was that it was a dispute as to whether Jesus were dead or alive.[5] Probably he was quite genuinely perplexed as to why neither side could produce any conclusive evidence.

But it is unnecessary to labour the point farther. What concerns us is to note that we have in *Acts* exactly the same background of belief which we have seen already in the Epistles. Beside this we are shown how these beliefs spread with extraordinary rapidity to a large number of different places. Christians are what they are because Jesus has lived and died and is now alive again—and for no other reason. This has made the world a different place. Followers of *The Way* breathe a new air, and look upon everything in heaven and earth with new eyes.

1 1^{4-5}. 2 5^{28}. 3 6^{14}. 4 17^{18}. 5 25^{19}.

And the Risen Lord is no remote, inaccessible Potentate. He lives and works amongst men, and the signs of His Presence and Power are evident to those who have eyes to see. Sometimes the veil which hangs between His world and ours can be withdrawn, and He manifests Himself once more within the sphere in which our senses operate.

S. Stephen could see Him standing on the right hand of God,[1] ready to succour His servant in his extremity. Thrice at least S. Paul saw Him and heard His voice :[2] and the first occasion swept his whole life into a new channel.

Epistles, *Apocalypse*, and *Acts* cannot be explained away. They exist and they depict plainly the beliefs of those who wrote them, and of the readers for whom they were intended. Epistles and *Apocalypse* reveal the early stages of the great historic Society of which we are members. Without the picture which they give, the Church of to-day, and of the last eighteen centuries, would be an absolutely inexplicable phenomenon. We should not know how, when, or where it took its rise. *Acts* paints the process by which the one local Jewish Christian community became many, which were yet one, and embraced members of every nation. But still *Acts* does not really explain the process which it describes. It raises again the question which has been forced upon us before, upon which everything else turns—*Who was Jesus?* It presents it from a somewhat different angle. It throws some new light upon it. But we are still left without any answer which can be counted complete and final.

NOTE A. ON SPEAKING WITH TONGUES

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (2[4].)

As children we were probably told that the apostles were supernaturally enabled to speak various languages, with which they were previously unacquainted, in order that they might be in a position to preach the Gospel in every part of the world without loss of time. And this idea is embodied in the Proper Preface for Whitsuntide in the Communion Office.

[1] 755. [2] 9[3-6], 189-[10], 22[18-21].

But this simple explanation does not really fit the facts.

1. It is not definitely stated that the gift was permanent.

2. There have never been conditions under which there was less need for such a gift than those which prevailed at that time. In any part of the world which the apostles were at all likely to be able to reach (with the possible exception of Carthage) Greek was widely, if not universally understood. In fact the wide diffusion of Greek during the three centuries before the Birth of our Lord may fairly be regarded as part of the Divine Preparation of the world for Christ.

3. S. Paul would have had most need of such a gift. But if he ever possessed it [1] he did not receive it on that occasion. And it seems that he did not understand the vernacular of Lycaonia,[2] though the people of Lystra could apparently understand him when he spoke to them in Greek.

4. The gift was bestowed upon two other sets of people mentioned in *Acts*—Cornelius and his household,[3] and the disciples at Ephesus who had previously received only the Baptism of John.[4] It was also found in the Church at Corinth.[5] But in these three instances it does not appear that it was regarded as a call to missionary work, or associated with the performance of it.

Our principal source of information on the subject is the fourteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. From this it appears that the *tongue* was generally unintelligible to the audience. It required interpretation, which the speaker himself was not necessarily able to supply. S. Paul could not quite say that the practice ought not to go on at all: indeed he seems to have possessed the gift himself. But he thought that it was liable to lead to disorder, and to bring discredit upon the Church.

Now it is noteworthy that on the Day of Pentecost the opinion of the audience was divided. Some were deeply impressed by hearing the apostles speak of the wonderful works of God in what appeared to them to be the vernacular of their own part of the world. In the ears of others the apostles were raving unintelligibly; and the most natural explanation seemed to be that they were not sober.

This suggests very strongly that speaking with tongues demands something of both sides. The faculties of the audience, as well as those of the speaker, require to be raised to a level

[1] *1 Cor.* $14^{6, 18}$. [2] *Acts* 14^{11-13}. [3] 10^{46}.
[4] 19^{6}. [5] *1 Cor.* 14^{1-33}.

above the normal before what is said can be intelligible. We can see that if this had occurred a new and special relationship might be set up between the speaker and his audience. There might be a heightening of the sympathetic accord which must always be established before any speech can be effective. This accord is necessarily only temporary, and the power of creating it for the moment is a very large part of the art of the orator. Given an exceptional heightening of this accord the meaning of words which would otherwise be unintelligible might become clear. But here we are trespassing upon the region of psychology, and of the psychology of what is called *the subconscious mind*, and the field is admittedly obscure and slippery.

Similar phenomena have appeared from time to time in the Church's history, at periods of strong religious excitement.[1] The two best known instances in modern times are the Camisards in France at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and the Irvingites in England a hundred years later.

The Camisards were the Protestant peasants of the Cevennes who were much persecuted after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They were seized with slightly convulsive attacks ending in unconsciousness. During these attacks they spoke good French, though ordinarily they could speak no language but their own *patois*. They must, however, have acquired some knowledge of classical French through their devotional use of the Huguenot Bible.

It would seem therefore that their 'gift', though a curious and interesting phenomenon, was of no practical value whatever. It can hardly be said to possess any religious significance at all.

The Irvingites were even less successful. They hoped that the gift of tongues might be restored to them in order that they might do missionary work. But they seem to have achieved nothing beyond ravings which, when they were not in English, bore no relation to any known language. I believe that of late years they have discontinued the practice, though they still regard the restoration of the gift as theoretically possible and to be desired.

Possibly they made a fatal mistake in deliberately seeking and trying to cultivate what can only be genuine if it comes unexpectedly. A real *gift* can only be received : not acquired.

The failure of later experiments does not, however, mean that the gift could never have been (or even that it could never be

[1] For a discussion of these see *The Earlier Epistles of S. Paul*, by Kirsopp Lake, pp. 241–52. (Rivingtons, 1911.) I have borrowed Professor Lake's account of the Camisards.

again) a genuine mark of spiritual power, as it is represented in *Acts*. But its nature is admittedly obscure, and seems likely to remain so. The fact that its most conspicuous modern manifestations have been of no value does not impugn the credibility of S. Luke's narrative, nor the view which he took of it. Church history is encrusted with many foolish, incredible, and unedifying legends, comparable with the growths which foul the bottom of a ship and impair her speed, but this does not prove that there are no men and women who deserve to be called *Saints*, or that God has never really revealed truth by means of visions.

NOTE B. ON THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE SPEECHES REPORTED IN *ACTS*

Acts contains in all twenty-four accounts of formal speeches delivered by different people on various occasions.

1. S. Peter to the brethren at Jerusalem. 1^{16-22}.
2. S. Peter to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost. 2^{14-36}.
3. S. Peter in Solomon's Porch. 3^{11-26}.
4. S. Peter to the Rulers and Elders. 4^{8-12}.
5. The united prayer of the Church. 4^{24-31}.
6. S. Peter to the Council. 5^{29-32}.
7. Gamaliel to the Council. 5^{35-9}.
8. S. Stephen to the Council. 7^{2-53}.
9. S. Peter to Cornelius. 10^{34-43}.
10. S. Peter to the Church. 11^{4-17}.
11. S. Paul in the synagogue at Antioch. 13^{16-41}.
12. S. Peter to the Council. 15^{7-11}.
13. S. James at the Council of Jerusalem. 15^{13-21}.
14. S. Paul at Athens. 17^{22-31}.
15. The Town Clerk at Ephesus. 19^{35-41}.
16. S. Paul to the Elders of the Church at Miletus. 20^{18-35}.
17. The Elders at Jerusalem to S. Paul. 21^{20-5}.
18. S. Paul to the Jews at Jerusalem. 22^{3-21}.
19. S. Paul to the Council. 23^{1-6}.
20. Tertullus to Felix. 24^{2-8}.
21. S. Paul to Felix. 24^{10-21}.
22. Festus to Agrippa. 25^{14-21}, $^{24-7}$.
23. S. Paul to Agrippa. 26^{2-29}.
24. S. Paul to the Jews at Rome. 28^{17-20}.

All these read as if they were *verbatim* reports. But the question arises—what was S. Luke's authority for them? Some

of the later ones he may have heard himself, and if he had already conceived the idea of writing *Acts* he might have taken notes for the purpose. And S. Paul could have supplied him with information with regard to others.

But S. Paul would have known nothing of the earlier speeches ascribed to S. Peter, and it is unlikely that any part of them was written down at the time. It is also hard to see how any exact report of Gamaliel's speech to the Sanhedrin could have come to Christian ears, as it is definitely implied that (as was natural) the apostles were not allowed to hear it.[1]

The record of S. Peter's speeches which *Acts* gives us was not made until more than twenty-five years after they were delivered, and we cannot therefore credit them with the verbal accuracy which they appear to claim.

But it is to be remembered first, that the ancient world did not attach our importance to verbal accuracy, and secondly that an ancient historian would have no hesitation in putting a speech in the first person into the mouth of one of his characters, where his modern successor would content himself with an impersonal paragraph. It is merely a question of two rather different conceptions of the way in which history ought to be written.

We cannot say that S. Peter actually used the precise words which S. Luke puts into his mouth the best part of a generation afterwards. But we need not doubt that they correspond more or less with what he said, and that they represent faithfully the general tenor of the earliest Christian preaching : particularly as regards the passages from the Old Testament to which appeal is made.

The same applies, though probably in a lesser degree, to the speeches ascribed to S. Paul.

The speech of S. Stephen stands by itself. Its close argument and gradual *crescendo* of indignation must be counted as beyond the art of the most sympathetically imaginative historian. It is difficult not to hold that it is an accurate, if not absolutely complete, record of what he really said.

We can well understand that the speech made so deep an impression on the mind of one of the audience, a young man named Saul, that years afterwards he could repeat it word for word.

[1] 5[40].

VII

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

No one can read the first three Gospels without seeing that they are obviously telling the same story. Sometimes they agree word for word: sometimes they agree in substance though their phraseology is not identical. Where they differ the differences are such as might be expected to occur in histories which were not written down until more than a generation after the events which they describe. And, as is also natural, there are a few instances in which each evangelist has made use of sources of information peculiar to himself.

For a long time it was held that until our Gospels appeared the story of our Lord's Life and the record of His sayings had been handed down by oral tradition only. The account of what He had said and done had been preserved and propagated by word of mouth in the Christian community: and this body of oral narrative had been committed to writing by the evangelists for the first time. They had worked without reference to each other, and each Gospel was therefore to be regarded as an entirely independent witness. A threefold cord is not easily broken, and the remarkable measure of agreement between the three narratives was considered to attest, beyond any possibility of doubt, the genuineness and accuracy of what was called *The Triple Tradition.*

But the studies of the last fifty years have led us to take a different view. It is now universally recognized that the Gospels are not three independent authorities. S. Matthew and S. Luke did not, apparently, borrow from each other. But each made considerable use of written documents, one of which very closely resembled S. Mark, if it was not absolutely identical with it.

Briefly, the literary history of the three Gospels which we now possess appears to have been as follows.[1]

Very shortly after the Ascension a collection was made of our Lord's sayings. This was probably in Aramaic, which was His own mother-tongue and that of the first circle of His disciples. It was intended for those who knew the facts of His life of their own knowledge, and was therefore in no sense a biography of Him. As those who were expected to read it were Jews, who from their cradles had been familiar with the Old Testament, it would be natural that amongst the sayings selected for preservation a specially prominent place should be given to those in which He professed or appeared to fulfil the prophecies of old time. The principal purpose of this collection was to assure or to convince the Jewish reader that He was the Messiah of Israel, of whom the prophets had spoken.

This document, which is referred to by scholars as Q [2], does not now exist: nor can it be completely reconstructed from any material at our disposal. We can only be confident that it did exist, from the traces of it which survive in our Gospels, and conjecture, with a tolerable degree of certainty, the general nature of its contents.

Before many years had passed it was translated into Greek, for the benefit of those who could not read Aramaic. In its Greek form it was used both by S. Matthew and by S. Luke.

But as the Christian circle widened it soon came to include those who had never seen our Lord in the flesh, and possessed no first-hand knowledge of any of the events of the Incarnate Life. In their interest the original Q had to be supplemented, and something approaching to a biography of Him had to be put on paper in Greek, to be read with the existing record of His sayings. This was done by S. Mark, though the Gospel which we now possess is probably not exactly as it left his hand. Our S. Mark is an edition of S. Mark's own Gospel, but its divergences from the original are neither extensive nor important.

[1] For the following paragraphs I am much indebted to Professor Stanton's *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, Part II. (Cambridge University Press, 1909.)

[2] From the German *Quelle* meaning *Source*.

(It is a matter of common knowledge that the last twelve verses are by another hand : according to one tradition that of *Aristion the presbyter*. This means that all our copies of S. Mark are derived from a manuscript of which the last leaf had somehow perished. The editor finding his original defective filled in the gap with a summary in his own words of what he knew or believed the missing verses to have contained.)

The original of S. Mark was used by S. Luke : and our edition of it—or something so close to our Gospel as to be virtually indistinguishable from it—was used by S. Matthew.

We cannot say positively whether S. Matthew and S. Luke used any other document beside Q and S. Mark, or whether the matter which they contain which is not drawn from either of these sources was derived from oral tradition only. But the first three verses of S. Luke's Gospel imply that there were other writings available which he might have used if he thought them sufficiently trustworthy. If he did employ any other documents it is a tempting conjecture—though it is a mere conjecture—that one of them was the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*.

Now it is noteworthy that the Evangelists are not the people to whom we should naturally look for the work which they have actually done. There are not, and never can be, any writings in the world of an importance comparable with that of those to which the Church turns for its knowledge of the words and acts of our Lord. Nothing can matter more to us than that we should possess as full and as accurate a record of our Lord's Ministry as possible. We might therefore naturally have expected to find that such a record had been provided for us by the apostles. The Eleven might have combined to produce a book which should embody their united recollections, and would have been given to the world with the immense weight of their joint authority. Or they might have deputed one or more of their number to act on their behalf. They were His chosen friends. He intended them to be the foundation on which His Church was to be built. They were continually with Him, and their knowledge of Him was unique, alike in its extent and its intimacy. They alone could have given us the substance of those private discourses, to which our Gospels only refer in

passing.[1] They, better than any other men, could have given us a description of His appearance. They, and they alone, could have told us very much that we should like to know.

But the authors of the first three Gospels were not drawn from their ranks. S. Mark may have been one of the first circle of disciples, though we cannot say positively that he was. His name does not appear until after the Ascension.[2] And although tradition affirms, with a considerable degree of probability, that his Gospel is to a large extent the *Gospel according to S. Peter*,[3] this does not alter the fact that he himself was not an apostle, and in all probability not an eyewitness of any of the scenes which he describes.

S. Luke, we know, was not one of the original circle. It is virtually certain that his conversion was due to S. Paul and therefore did not take place until some years after the Ascension. He expressly disclaims any first-hand knowledge of the events. He may have met some who had been eyewitnesses of them when he paid his visit to Jerusalem in company with S. Paul,[4] but his chief sources of information were such documents as he could find. He was in the position of the man who at the present day should undertake to write a history of (say) the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. He would have to rely principally upon documents, though he might be able to check or amplify them here and there in points of detail by the reminiscences of old men who had in their youth taken part in the campaign. We know that one of the documents which he used was Q. But we do not know by whom Q was originally composed, nor by whom it was translated from Aramaic into Greek.

Our first Gospel is ascribed by tradition to an apostle. But it is unlikely that S. Matthew was in fact the author.

In the first place, there is the explicit statement of Eusebius that S. Matthew wrote his Gospel in Aramaic.[5] Our S. Matthew, though it appears to have been intended primarily for readers who were familiar with the Old Testament (and were

1 *S. Mark* 4[34].

2 The identification of the evangelist with the unnamed *young man* of *S. Mark* 14[51] is purely conjectural and not very probable.

3 Eusebius, *H. E.* vi. 14 quoting Clement of Alexandria.

4 *Acts* 21[17].

5 *H. E.* iii. 39, quoting Papias. See p. 176, *n.* 1.

therefore presumably Jews at least by religion if not by race), bears no trace of ever having been translated. We can say positively that it was written in Greek, and must therefore ignore the testimony of Papias if we persist in ascribing it to Matthew the Apostle.

Secondly, its own character is against the traditional authorship. It nowhere professes to be the work of an eyewitness. Its chronology for all the earlier part of our Lord's Ministry is exceedingly vague, and it depends manifestly and directly upon two older documents—Q and S. Mark. It is inconceivable that an apostle who could write of his own knowledge should have preferred to copy documents, of which one at least was the work of a writer whose personal authority was not equal to his own.

We must conclude that our first Gospel is anonymous and not the work of an eyewitness. The real *S. Matthew* must have disappeared completely at an early date. But the fact that Matthew the Apostle had written a Gospel was remembered: and therefore, by a readily intelligible process, his name came to be attached to a Gospel which was universally recognized as of first-class authority and bore no other name.

We must therefore recognize that no one of the first three Gospels is by the hand of an apostle, and that the story which they tell is not at first hand. They give us the record of our Lord's life in the form which the story had assumed rather more than a generation after the Ascension. They represent the story as it had come to be told in Christian circles by about the year A.D. 65. Our oldest Gospel (S. Mark) has perhaps undergone revision at the hands of an editor whose name we do not know. The other two avowedly[1] depend very largely upon S. Mark and upon another Greek document of unknown authorship, which does not now exist.

Now this may seem to be a very damaging admission. In fact it may seem to some to have gone far towards destroying the authority of the Gospels altogether. If the foregoing paragraph be true can we regard them as trustworthy records? Do they

[1] In the sense that the authors make no attempt to disguise their debt to him. They do not, of course, acknowledge it in modern fashion.

really deserve the peculiar reverence which the Church has always paid to them ?

It is quite true that the literary history of the Gospels is not what we should naturally have expected. They are not, perhaps, in many respects the type of record which we should have elected to possess if we had been given any choice in the matter. We might have asked for something longer and more detailed. We might have preferred the first-hand work of an apostle, written during the weeks between the first Easter and the Day of Pentecost, while all the events of the wonderful life were at their freshest in his mind. But the Gospels which we possess are what God has in fact given to us. And it is therefore futile, as well as rather profane, to wish that they were other than they really are. We might as well wish that the Incarnation had taken place in other surroundings, and that the Incarnate Life had been prolonged over a greater number of years. We may think that it would have been better if It had been lived at a period of the world's history when the camera and the phonograph could have furnished us with their own peculiarly vivid records. But the fact remains that it was not so.

Now if we call ourselves Christians we are compelled to recognize at least three things :

First : That God has an intelligible purpose for mankind.

Secondly : That the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth stand in unique relation to that purpose.

Thirdly : That the living visible Church is the organ which God has called into being for the translation of His purpose into effective reality.

We are therefore bound to believe that the Gospels which we possess are adequate for the purpose which God intends them to serve. It is our duty to study them as closely as we can from every point of view, and to weigh carefully the story which they tell : remembering always that the real value of the documents cannot be enhanced by any halo with which imagination can surround either the persons of the authors or their method of working.

The literary history of the first three Gospels is a very interesting branch of study. It is well worth while to examine as closely as possible their relation to each other, and to trace

as minutely as we can the successive stages of the process by which they have come to be exactly what they are.

This study has been very diligently prosecuted by many scholars in many countries, and we can now say confidently that their main conclusions will never be reversed. What is called *The Synoptic Problem* has now come near to a complete solution. There are still some points in it with regard to which we should be glad of fuller or more certain knowledge. But unless some new source of information should come into our hands this may never be within our reach. If some library which has not yet been thoroughly explored, or the stuffing of some Egyptian mummy-case which has not yet been opened, should yield us a complete copy of the works of Papias [1] a good deal of light would probably be thrown upon some matters which are at present obscure. But it is to be feared that both these contingencies are remote, though the latter is perhaps the more probable of the two.

But questions such as these are not in the strict sense of the word religious ones: nor are they even of first-rate religious importance. What concerns us as Christian readers of the New Testament to-day is not so much—How did the Gospel story come to assume its present form? as—What does the story which we have got really say? No Christian proposes to discard the Gospels in favour of any other documents.[2] What we want to do is to understand them as well as we can, and to estimate correctly the conclusions which are to be drawn from them. Their value to us depends upon their contents more than upon their history.

The story which they tell is too familiar to need any recapitulation in detail. But before we attempt to analyse it in any way two preliminary facts deserve to be borne in mind.

First, that the Gospels which the Church receives are a selection from a very much larger number of Memoirs of our Lord which were produced for the edification of the Christian world.

[1] Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia about A.D. 120–40. He had met men who had met apostles. His works are known to us only by brief quotations in later writers.

[2] I believe that Mr. H. G. Wells is prepared to give them an honourable place in his new Bible.

Some of them exist in whole or in part to-day. But they have never ranked as Scripture. The Church decided with remarkable speed and unanimity that our Gospels stood on a pre-eminent plane of trustworthiness, and alone deserved to be counted authentic records of the Incarnate Life.

Secondly, a comparison of our Gospels with such apocryphal rivals as have come down to us at once confirms the Church's judgement. Our Gospels are markedly superior in many ways; most notably in their attitude towards the miraculous element in our Lord's Life. The question of miracles will be discussed at greater length towards the close of this chapter. At the moment it is sufficient to say that the Evangelists' handling of the miraculous is marked by a severe restraint which we do not find in the works of their rivals. They give the impression—to say the least—of men who are honestly endeavouring to keep as close as possible to what they sincerely believe to be the historic truth. Also a moral and spiritual purpose is discernible in the miracles which they narrate.

In the apocryphal Gospels imagination runs riot and produces stories which are intrinsically improbable and inherently worthless. Their miracles are on the level of conjuring tricks which might have served to amuse an idle hour—and no more.

We are therefore entitled to bring to our reading of the Gospels a predisposition in favour of their essential trustworthiness. This is based not upon any fictitious view of their authorship or of the method of their composition. It is derived from our knowledge of the fact that they have had many would-be rivals, and upon a comparison of their contents with those of the books which the Church has rejected.

Now there are some who profess to treat the Gospel-story very lightly. They see in it no more than the history of a young enthusiast who tried to reform the rigid, oppressive, and in some ways gloomy religion in which he had been brought up. At first his preaching met with a considerable measure of success: and this proved his undoing. For it brought him into collision with Authority, and threatened to imperil Vested Interests. Authority became alarmed and decided that he must be silenced. And Authority succeeded in gaining its end. But the loftiness

of his ideals and the beauty of his character still stir the imagination of many, though of a decreasing number, so that the triumph of Authority has not been in reality quite as complete as it seemed to be at the time.

And this kind of summary of the story is generally rounded off with a few cynical observations as to the nature of ecclesiastics in all ages and countries whatever titles they bear, or whatever master they profess to follow. The publications of the *Rationalist Press Association* not infrequently take this line.

But cynics always live in a small world, and their powers of perception naturally become constricted to the limits of their environment. For no reasonable person can fail to find in the Gospel-story more than this.

No one whose opinion deserves to be taken seriously can help recognizing that our Lord was not quite as other men. No one has ever read the human heart with such unerring insight, or probed human motive with so sure a touch. No one has ever shown more unfailing sympathy with all who genuinely sought His help—however degraded they might be. No one has ever fallen with a more appalling weight of anger—appalling because all who saw it knew instinctively that it was just—upon every form of hardness, insincerity, and self-satisfaction. And there is no one whose teaching and example have meant, and mean to-day, half so much to the world. There are many—perhaps an increasing number—who reject the name of *Christian* with scorn and can see in the Church of history little but the worst enemy of human happiness, who yet acknowledge that in Him they see an ideal which is not to be found elsewhere.

He has created a new standard of values which has already affected very deeply the course of human history. The influence of Christianity upon the world cannot be called anything but marvellous when we remember that less than two thousand years have elapsed since it was first launched, and that hardly one-third of the human race has as yet even professed to accept it. The achievements of Christianity are amazing, to the verge of being utterly incredible, in view of the fact that it has never commanded more than the half-hearted allegiance of a minority of mankind. And we who believe that the Church is still in its

infancy do not doubt that the world will see greater things than these.

No one can dispute our Lord's title to be counted Captain of the noble army of martyrs. He is beyond question the greatest and most admirable of all those who have died bravely for a great idea.

This is probably the estimate of Him which is most widely held in the civilized world to-day. But even this falls a very long way short of the view which is taken by the Church. And it does not really harmonize with the story which the Gospels tell. If we are to hold that view we must deliberately set aside a very large part of the Evangelists' narrative. And it is not merely a question of rejecting certain incidents as unhistorical or as the interpolations of a later hand. We have got to ignore the general tone and tenor of the story taken as a whole. We shall find ourselves obliged to assume that the entire story of the Life of Jesus has been transformed in a very subtle fashion by the imagination of the authors. And this has been done in such a way that we can hardly put a finger upon any one episode and say, This is not true: nor can we disinter any particular fragment the truth of which may be regarded as beyond question. From beginning to end the story has been so dexterously remodelled that the general impression which it produces upon the careful reader of to-day has really very little relation to any impression which the Historic Life could have produced upon those who were eyewitnesses of it.

But this hypothesis is open to at least three very serious objections.

First: It is avowedly quite arbitrary. It is not the outcome of anything which can be called scientific criticism. The process by which it is reached is simply this: 'If this story be true Jesus is unique amongst the sons of men. He stands by Himself, and there is no one who can really be compared with Him. I think it unlikely that there ever was a unique man, who was morally at least as far above me as I am above my dog. Therefore I dismiss the story as untrue.'

What should we think of a man who should say, 'The accounts which physiologists give of the phenomena of nature are too

wonderful to be taken seriously and examined scientifically. I will therefore dismiss them as hallucination and falsehood'?

Secondly: It ascribes to the Evangelists a literary skill and an imaginative force which can only be called Superhuman. No one can question the justice of the words which the Fourth Evangelist has put into the mouth of His enemies: *Never man spake like this man.*[1] And whether is easier, to recognize that those words represent a truth (which means that the Figure has been drawn faithfully from the life), or to adopt the only possible alternative and to say, *Never man wrote like these men*?

Thirdly: For what reason was this complete and subtle transformation of the story carried out? It cannot have been done instinctively or unintentionally. The supreme skill with which it has been effected means that it must have been very carefully and deliberately planned. It is hardly possible that there should not have been some unsuccessful attempts. The Evangelists must have written and rewritten their Gospels over and over again before they had brought them to the pitch of delicate perfection which we know. And all this was done whilst eyewitnesses of the Life, men who could say what impression it really had produced on them, were still alive. What purpose could have been served by producing a portrait of which an apostle could only have said, This is not the Jesus I knew?

It is impossible to see any motive, whether religious, political, or sentimental, which could have induced the Evangelists to transform their Hero in this fashion. They have not brought Him into harmony with their own predispositions and prejudices. They have not created a legend which might serve to enhance the national reputation of the Jews, and might enable another to gratify the aspirations which Jesus Himself had so grievously disappointed. They have, in fact, done exactly the reverse. The effect of their work has been to emphasize the moral gulf which yawns between Him and even His chosen friends, to enhance the infamy attaching to the bulk of the Jewish nation,

[1] *S. John* 7[46].

and to secure, as far as possible, that no follower of His would ever take up arms in the cause of Jewish political independence.[1]

Yet two of the three Evangelists were themselves Jews. The Christian community was overwhelmingly of Jewish origin; and S. Luke must have derived his information from Jewish sources.

It is easy to see motives which might have led to a modification of the history of Jesus in the interests of Jewish patriotism. But where can any motive be found which would account for the transformation of the greatest of the Prophets into the Hero of the Christian Gospel? How has it come about that the Champion of Israel has been swallowed up in the Son of Man?

We cannot escape the conclusion that the Evangelists wrote as they did because they, in common with the whole Christian community, were convinced that that, and nothing else, was the truth. The impression which their story makes on the reader of to-day must represent the impression which Jesus really produced upon those who followed Him in the days of His Flesh.

Now when we read the story carefully our attention is caught at once by two very remarkable features in it.

First: From the very beginning He definitely and avowedly claimed for Himself what can only be called 'a supernatural position'. According to S. Mark, He began His public ministry with the words: *The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe in the Gospel.*[2] That was an announcement—we may call it a challenge if we will—which no one who heard it could possibly ignore. Its significance will become clearer if we venture to paraphrase it as follows: *All your highest hopes are on the point of being fulfilled. For their fulfilment you must repose unlimited confidence in Me.*

No one else has ever dared to introduce himself to the world in terms even resembling these. Then and there He declared that He was the central figure of all Hebrew history. On Him, and on Him alone, the Law and the Prophets converged. As

[1] In the Third Jewish War in A.D. 132 the Christians of Palestine refused to take up arms against the Romans and were severely persecuted by the Jews in consequence.

[2] 1[15].

there had been none before Him who had dared to speak thus of himself, so there could be none after Him to rival or to share His position. The claim could be made once only. If it were justified, then He who had made it for Himself must be unique for all time. Every one who heard it knew that.

According to S. Luke,[1] when He was asked to lead the worship of the synagogue in His native Nazareth He chose for His reading a passage of Isaiah which speaks of the divine endowment and mission of God's chosen servant. When He had read less than two verses He stopped *and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened upon Him.* There was something in His appearance, though He can have been no stranger to the majority of those present: some new note, it may be, in His voice which made the congregation realize that a new chapter in the history of religion was being opened before their eyes. And the first words of His discourse left no room for any uncertainty as to His meaning. *To-day,* He said, *hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.* Then and there He carried the claim which He made on His own behalf to the highest possible pitch. That claim might be widely and deeply resented: it might be resisted with unscrupulous ferocity: such was in fact the case on that day,[2] and on many later occasions. But there could be no possible doubt as to what it was.

And from that position which He had assumed with such uncompromising boldness He never receded. His teaching was marked throughout by a note of authority, as startling as it was unfamiliar.[3] And the authority which He claimed was throughout entirely personal. It did not spring from any position which He held in the ordered hierarchy of the Jewish Church. It did not need to be buttressed by the prestige of any venerable name. Established custom and immemorial tradition might speak with no uncertain voice. Above them, above all the clamour of the rabbinic schools, rose His clear challenge, *But I say unto you.*[4]

And claims so astonishing in word were confirmed by the manifestation of powers no less astonishing in action. Even His enemies could not deny the reality of His mighty works.

1 4^{16}. 2 *S. Luke* 4^{28-30}. 3 *S. Mark* 1^{22}. 4 *S. Matt.* 5^{22}, &c.

All they could attempt was to undermine His rising reputation by suggesting that the sources upon which He drew were evil. That He wielded powers of a supernatural kind could not be gainsaid. But it might be possible to persuade the people of Galilee that they were merely the measure of His supernatural wickedness.[1]

The unique position which He claimed for Himself is made to rest upon His unique relation to, and knowledge of, God.[2] The authority with which He speaks, the power with which He acts, the allegiance which He demands of His followers,—all have a common source. All alike spring from what God is to Him.

There have been many instances in history, especially in the history of religion, of men who, having a real mission to discharge and bringing to their task much real greatness of mind and soul, must yet be considered to have failed. And their failure has not consisted of mere inability to translate their ideals into fact. It has been of a more serious and far-reaching character. It has consisted in the abandonment of the original ideal, and in the substitution of something more specious but in reality inferior. And the translation into fact of the lower ideal has generally proved only too easy, and has been carried through with devastating success. Unforeseen circumstances, especially the ungovernable enthusiasm of his followers, have forced many a high-minded religious reformer into a position which at the outset of his career he never dreamed of occupying. He has found himself driven far beyond his original intention, and his failure becomes complete when he has persuaded himself that the new position which has been thrust upon him is the one which he has the best right to hold.

Mahomet, for example, was one of these. But Jesus was not. He never departed one hair's breadth from His original ideal. At the outset of His ministry He made for Himself the most exalted claim, and He never heightened nor abated it in the least degree.

He steadily refused the position of political leader which His followers were anxious to thrust upon Him.[3] When it became

[1] *S. Mark* 3^{22-30}. [2] e.g. *S. Matt.* 10^{32-3}, 11^{25-30}, 12^{50}.
[3] *S. Mark* 1^{38}, 10^{41-5}, 12^{13-17}, &c.

clear to Him that the course which He had chosen must lead to His own death, He neither hesitated nor turned aside.[1] He knew what His course was to be, and He held it steadily to the end. When He stood before Caiaphas He was exactly the same as He had been when He began to teach by the shore of the sea of Galilee. Popularity and opposition alike left Him as they found Him, unterrified, unshaken, unseduced. Can we point to any other historical Figure of whom we are entitled to say the same? Where else can such strength and singleness of purpose be found?

Secondly: He never reveals the slightest consciousness of sin upon His own part. And it would be difficult to overrate the significance of this fact. It is not that He was indifferent to sin, or regarded it lightly. On the contrary, He rebuked it with terrible severity, and continually called attention to its awful consequences. He felt at least as keenly as any one else has ever done—a Christian would say, More keenly than any other—that the relationship between God and man has been distorted by man's own act, and that nothing matters so much as that it should be restored to what God had meant it to be. He knew that the world's supreme need is redemption from the weight of sin which presses upon it. But in that sin He felt He Himself had no share whatever.

The story of the Temptation in the Wilderness[2] shows that before He began His public ministry different possibilities presented themselves to His mind. There was more than one line of action before Him, and He was compelled to make an exclusive choice. This was not easy. He may well have hesitated long before He made His decision, and it may be that like doubts assailed Him on later occasions.[3]

But once His decision had been made it never occurred to Him to question it. He never took any step which conscience could urge Him to retrace. Never once did the possibility cross His mind that it would have been better if He had spoken or acted differently.

So He is depicted by the Evangelists. But they—in common

1 *S. Matt.* 16^{21-5}; *S. Mark* 10^{32-4}, &c.
2 *S. Matt.* 4^{1-11}. 3 *S. Luke* 22^{28}.

with all others all the world over who have ever tried to take religion seriously—must have known full well that there was many a stain of sin upon their own lives. They knew that their own consciences were not entirely clear, and that the Gospel of repentance was preached to them as much as to any one else.

Yet they have succeeded in painting the portrait of a man in whose life there was neither room nor need for repentance. And it cannot be said that they have set themselves deliberately to depict Him so. They have never said in so many words, *He was without sin,* but very subtly, with innumerable delicate touches, they have presented Him to us free from sin. There is no single passage to which we can point in proof of His sinlessness, or of His own claim to be sinless.[1] But His own sense of His own complete freedom from sin runs like a thread of gold through the entire story from beginning to end.

Can such a feat be regarded, with any show of reason, as within the compass of human imagination and literary skill? Certainly it has never been accomplished before or since. Yet here the picture has been drawn and we have to account for it as best we may. What explanation of it can be regarded as possible except that it is the impression which He had left (we may say Unconsciously if we choose) upon those who had known Him? The atmosphere which surrounds Him in the pages of the Gospel attests its own genuineness. It could not exist, if it were not really His own. It is not the direct outcome of His teaching, but the clear effluence of His Character.

We, who have been brought up as Christians from the cradle, have always been accustomed to think and speak of Jesus as without sin. And therefore we are sometimes slow to realize the enormous import of the familiar belief.

From time to time men have arisen in various parts of the world who have made important contributions to the religious history of mankind, for which their names are rightly held in honour to-day. They have been men of lofty moral character and profound spiritual insight. They have seen and felt the world's need of redemption, and have been convinced that they

[1] Reference to the Fourth Gospel is purposely excluded from this Chapter.

had a message of salvation to deliver. They have aimed at reforming the religion which they shared with those amongst whom they lived. If we leave the Hebrew prophets on one side, Siddartha the Buddha is the most famous of these, and perhaps rises higher than any one else who owed nothing, either directly or indirectly, to Christianity has ever done. Parallels between these great souls and Jesus are sometimes drawn. And in many ways the comparison may seem to be natural. But those who are impressed by the closeness of the parallel seem always to have overlooked the difference which far outweighs any points of resemblance which may be found. Others who have been profoundly conscious of human sin, have been equally conscious that they themselves shared it. They have dared to call men to repentance, because they have repented themselves. Their overmastering sense of the world's need of redemption has sprung from the knowledge of their own urgent personal need. They have tried to save others because they have believed that after much struggle and failure, after fears and anxieties bordering on despair, they have at last managed to set their own feet upon the way of salvation. The measure of their holiness has been the depth and reality of their sense of their own sinfulness. They would never have desired their disciples to claim perfection for them; and they have never been free from the fear which haunted S. Paul, lest after having preached to others they themselves should be cast away.[1]

Such has been the common experience of all saints, whether within or without the Christian Church. It is shared to some extent by all who try to make conscience their guide, and believe that when it speaks they catch at least a far-off echo of the Voice of God. The religious experience of the ordinary man or woman of to-day differs from that of the saints only in intensity and depth. The Saints have advanced farther along the road than we have. But their road and ours are manifestly, indisputably, the same.

The spiritual history of other great heroes of religion differs entirely from that of Jesus. Superficial resemblances there may be; but in the deepest, most essential matter of all there

[1] *1 Cor.* 9^{27}.

is not only no resemblance, but nothing which can be called common ground. The Saints became what they were through the pressure of their own sense of sin: in His life that sense did not exist. The Saints' own hunger for redemption opened their eyes to the world's common need. He saw that need at least as clearly as any other has ever done. But He could offer Himself as its satisfaction, because He did not share it.

In this respect, in His complete freedom from any consciousness of sin, more conspicuously than in any other single point, He is unique. History does not furnish us with any parallel to Him. Yet the picture has been drawn; and there is no escape from the conclusion that it has been drawn from the life. This means that the Hero of the Gospel can only be regarded as a Moral Miracle so stupendous that it is altogether beyond our power to predicate anything whatever of Him. We cannot assume that something must necessarily be true of Him because we have found it to be true of others. We can only take the Portrait which has been handed down to us, as we have received it, and interpret it as best we may. Our difficulty will always be to appreciate it justly: to abstain from transforming it into something nearer our own level and in closer harmony with our own experience.

The Evangelists credit our Lord with a number of what they call *mighty works* to which we usually apply the name *miracles*. The majority of these consist of the instantaneous cure of disease, or of long-standing physical infirmities such as blindness or deafness, by a word or a touch. Sometimes the disease appears to be of the nature of what we should now call insanity, and is attributed to possession by evil spirits. The cure is then effected by the expulsion of the devils. In two instances our Lord's healing power was extended to the point of bringing the dead back to life.[1]

Miracles of healing, albeit upon a less extensive scale, are ascribed to some of the apostles and to others in Acts, and the power of working them seems to be assumed by S. Paul as a matter of course.[2]

Beside these there are some miracles recorded which show

[1] *Mark* 5$^{35-43}$; *Luke* 7$^{11-17}$. [2] *1 Cor.* 12$^{28-9}$; *Gal.* 35.

an unparalleled control over inanimate matter or over the forces of nature.[1]

For many centuries these stories were accepted as historical without demur, and were considered to attest the divine origin and authority of the Gospel as nothing else could have done. In the fifteenth century Pope Pius II could say: 'Christianity, *even if it were not approved by miracles*, ought to be received for its own worth';[2] and this was regarded as one of the more remarkable sayings of a very remarkable man.

But the modern standpoint has become entirely different. Now these stories are felt by many to be a stumbling-block, and their presence is held to throw discredit upon the Gospel as a whole. Ingenious attempts have been made to get rid of them, or to explain them away, on the ground that as they stand they cannot possibly be true.

A distinction is sometimes drawn between the miracles of healing, because something closely resembling them seems to have occurred from time to time in the later history of the Church, and to be not entirely unknown in our own day. But what are called the *nature-miracles* are dismissed as utterly impossible.

In our Lord's own day no one, whether Jew, Christian, or Pagan, would have felt any difficulty in accepting such stories. Belief in magic was universal, and portents of various kinds are common in every class of literature. We cannot therefore at the outset charge the Evangelists with having been exceptionally credulous or superstitious because they have allowed these incidents to find a place in their narrative. On the contrary, if we compare them either with the apocryphal Gospels, or with pagan works, such as Philostratus' Life of Apollonius of Tyana,[3] we cannot help being struck by their sobriety and self-restraint. The miraculous element in our Gospels is much smaller than might reasonably have been expected.

It is true that we can trace some heightening of this element in the later versions of the story. The miracles are perhaps a little

1 *Mark* 6$^{35-52}$.

2 Quoted by Creighton, *History of the Papacy*, vol. iii, p. 338 *n*.

3 A celebrated magician contemporary with our Lord. Philostratus, his biographer, was born about A.D. 180, and may have had some idea of making his hero an effectual rival to Christ.

more miraculous in S. Matthew and S. Luke than they are in S. Mark. That is only natural, and perhaps inevitable. S. Mark 16^{17-18} is a good illustration of the tendency. But we know that those words did not form part of his original Gospel, and we are not required to believe that they ever fell from our Lord's own lips. *They shall take up serpents* may very well have been prompted by the story of S. Paul's adventure at Malta, which is presumably perfectly true, but is not to be regarded as a miracle.

It has been held that all the miracles are interpolations made by superstition and credulity in the original story. And this view may retain some adherents still. On the strength of it attempts have been made to reconstruct the Life of Jesus as it really was, and to give us a purely ethical Gospel with nothing supernatural, in the ordinary sense of the word, about it. These attempts have not been successful, and there are probably fewer people to-day disposed to take them seriously than there were sixty years ago. The process by which a purely ethical gospel can be disinterred from the narrative of our Evangelists is entirely arbitrary, and owes nothing to anything except the predispositions and prejudices of the individual excavator. It does not rest upon any process of historical, literary, or textual criticism which has the slightest claim to be called Scientific. We have no reason for supposing that the Christian Gospel was ever preached in a form in which miracles had no place. We cannot take the short and simple course of brushing the miracles aside. Our task is the more difficult one of seeing what we can make of them.

Now the last few years have rudely disturbed many views which were generally regarded as axiomatic little more than a generation ago.

In the first place, our ideas as to personality, its nature, powers, and range have been considerably enlarged, and may be still further expanded before very long.

We know that only a very small part of our whole personality is ordinarily within our conscious knowledge, or subject to our conscious control. There are in us depths of being of whose extent, nature, and powers we are almost completely ignorant. Nor can we say what is taking place in them from hour to hour,

nor what might be the outcome if their resources were more thoroughly known to us, and under the dominion of our will.

We are also realizing that the mind has much more power over the body than we used to think, and that it can do a very great deal both to heal and to foster disease. We are certainly not yet in a position to say how far in this direction its powers may extend.

Secondly: We are less confident than the generation before us that we have mastered all the secrets of 'inanimate matter', and that we can define the limits of its possibilities with certain accuracy. X-rays and radium have expanded our horizon considerably, and now it seems to be possible, if not actually probable, that the matter which we used to look upon as dead, passive, inert stuff is at bottom in reality a form of energy. Modern science has reopened our eyes to the truth of the old saying, *Omnia exeunt in mysterium*; and has thereby rendered a very real service to the cause of religion.

Now in Jesus we are dealing with a unique personality. History provides no parallel to Him, and we have no right to try to compress Him within the limits with which we are familiar. Therefore we cannot prescribe His possibilities. We might indeed naturally expect a unique personality to possess unique powers. Given the outstanding moral miracle of a man without sin, miracles of a less stupendous character might not unnaturally be expected to follow in its train. We are certainly in no position to say what might or might not be possible for a will which had never been weakened by yielding to sin: that is to say, by having deliberately chosen the inferior, from the moral standpoint, of two alternatives. If we can imagine one sound and healthy man in a world of cripples and invalids, many of his most ordinary feats would appear altogether superhuman in the eyes of everybody else. Yet in reality they would be no more than that of which any one who was not, if we may so say, a caricature of what God had meant him to be would find himself to be capable. And that, the one healthy man in a world of cripples and invalids, is what Jesus is when compared with us. He alone actually was what every child of God ought to be.

We may therefore conclude that it is—to say the least—

certainly not impossible that the miracles contained in the Gospel should have taken place more or less (and more rather than less) as they are described.

And we are confirmed in this view by the fact that, with one possible exception,[1] the miracles all convey or enforce some spiritual lesson. They are not arbitrary additions to the story, designed to enhance the personal reputation of the Hero. They serve to mark stages in the gradual unfolding of a coherent, intelligible, systematic scheme of spiritual teaching. Here again they differ entirely from those recorded in the apocryphal Gospels, or ascribed to pagan magicians.

In view of the emphasis which has been laid on miracles by the Church in the past, and of the attention which has been focused upon them by modern writers, it is worth while to examine carefully Jesus' own attitude towards them.

First : He never used them to create faith in the first instance, but rather to confirm the struggling seed of faith where it had already found lodgement. Indeed His power of working them seems to have been in some measure bound up with the existence of faith in those who were to benefit immediately by them. For He is said to have found Himself as it were paralysed by the unbelief of those who had known Him from childhood.[2] There is a very noteworthy ring of genuineness about this statement. A romancer would almost certainly have represented Him as shattering unbelief by an overwhelming display of supernatural power. But the Evangelists affirm that miracles were not forthcoming precisely when and where they were, according to some modern notions, most necessary and would have proved most efficacious.

Secondly : He never used them to advertise Himself or His Mission. When He was pressed to work a miracle which, in the eyes of those who asked for it, would have had this effect, He always refused.[3] Sometimes He seems even to have gone to

[1] *S. Matt.* 17^{27}. The story of the shekel in the fish's mouth. I am inclined to think that this story has got altered in the telling, and that originally it contained no suggestion of miracle. S. Peter was directed to catch a fish, or possibly more than one, to sell it, and to pay the tribute with the proceeds.

[2] *S. Mark* 6^{5}

[3] *S. Mark* 8^{11} ; *S. Matt.* 12^{38}.

the very opposite extreme and to have wished to conceal what He had done, at any rate for a time.[1] Probably He feared that if the knowledge became public property immediately it might foster an unwholesome excitement which would be likely to hinder His purpose.

Once only did He appeal to His own *mighty works*, and that was in answer to the direct question addressed to Him by the Baptist: *Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?*[2] And in this case the circumstances were exceptional. The blood-relationship between John and Jesus makes it virtually certain that they had known one another from childhood. John had baptized Him, and from that moment at any rate must have been well aware of the claim which He preferred for Himself.[3] And this claim John was prepared to recognize. He was ready to acknowledge his Cousin as Messiah.

But as time went on Jesus showed Himself to be so utterly unlike the Messiah of tradition that John became perplexed. Had he, after all, made a mistake? He had been imprisoned by Herod, and further personal intercourse with Jesus was for the time being impossible. It was moreover unlikely that he would ever be released. Circumstances did not therefore admit of any method of answering his query except the one which Jesus adopted. Jesus' reply amounts to this: *Think over what I am doing. My course is a matter of common knowledge. Could any other befit better the Hope of Israel?*

And it is to be noted that the fact that *the poor have good tidings preached to them* is ranked with healing the sick and with raising the dead; if indeed it be not intended to be regarded as the climax of His achievements, and the most convincing proof of His claim.

It is therefore possible that readers of the Gospel-story have always tended to attach to the miracles which it contains an importance beyond that which was assigned to them by their Author. We may be justified in concluding that the Church in the past, and its critics in more modern times, have both

[1] *S. Mark* 5^{43}, 7^{36}. [2] *S. Matt.* 11^{3}.

[3] *S. Matt.* 3^{13-15}. I purposely omit the explicit recognition recorded in the Fourth Gospel, though I believe it to be historical.

made the same mistake, albeit from diametrically opposite motives, in that they have put upon miracles more weight than they were ever intended to bear.

It is possible that as the spiritual power of mankind increases some one may arise in the future who shall show himself capable of rivalling the mighty works recorded in the Gospel. The more closely we study our Lord's miracles, and the more carefully we consider their place in the Divine Scheme, the less likely (and perhaps the less to be desired) will the contingency appear to be. But be it never so remote we must, I think, regard it as not inconceivable. If it should occur I cannot see that the true value and significance of the Gospel miracles would be impaired in any way.

The conclusion of the story is too familiar to call for detailed repetition here.

Shortly before the Passover festival Jesus led His disciples to Jerusalem ; whether for the first time or not since the beginning of His public life does not for the moment concern us. He had already incurred the enmity of the most influential of His fellow-countrymen, and His appearance at Jerusalem gave them an unexpected opportunity. They were not slow to seize it. He was arrested and condemned to death by the Jewish authorities for blasphemy. They had no power to carry out the sentence themselves, and the charge was not one of which Roman law could take cognizance. But things which Jesus had really said about His Kingdom were perverted without much difficulty in such a way as to make Him appear to be a dangerous political revolutionary. On this ground Pontius Pilate agreed to the execution of the sentence, and He was put to death by crucifixion. This was a great shock to His followers. Up to the last possible moment they had believed that He had come to Jerusalem to claim the throne of His father David, and that the hour of His triumph was at hand. They expected confidently that He would use His supernatural power to overthrow His enemies, and to vindicate Himself before friend and foe alike.

And—He had not done so. He appeared to be entirely powerless in their hands, and He had died the death of a common

criminal. There was a real sting in the taunt—*He saved others, Himself He cannot save.*[1] With His death all the high hopes which He had encouraged His followers to build collapsed. The defeat was complete and irreparable, and the movement which He had inspired was finally at an end.

But then something happened which turned this defeat into an overwhelming victory. Otherwise the rest of the New Testament could never have been written, and there could be no such thing as the Christian Church in the world to-day. If the Gospel story ended at the Crucifixion we should be confronted with a perfectly insoluble problem.

What happened, what could have happened, capable of transforming the scattered, beaten, despairing followers of Jesus into the men whose exploits fill the pages of *Acts* and created the Christian communities revealed to us in the Epistles?

The disaster had been complete and unexpected. Therefore it could only have been reversed by some event of an equally momentous, and presumably unexpected, character. Conjecture as to its nature would be futile, and is fortunately unnecessary. The Gospels leave us in no doubt as to what it was.

Some thirty-six hours after His body had been buried a report reached the remnant of His followers that He was after all not dead. The rumour, which had at first seemed to be utterly incredible, was incredibly confirmed. His followers soon became convinced, with a certainty which did not admit of question, that He was not dead but alive. And, if we may so say, even more potently alive than He had been before.

It became clear to them that He had not merely eluded or survived His enemies' attack. He had met them face to face, and they had spent their strength against Him in vain. They had done their worst—and it had been to no purpose. He had triumphed not only over them, but over death itself. And this conviction transformed His followers into new men. It clothed them—as indeed well it might—with a hope which nothing could shake, a courage which nothing could daunt, and a power which their bitterest opponents could not deny. Its immediate outcome has been discussed in the earlier chapters of this book. Its later fruits are a matter of common knowledge.

[1] *S. Mark* 15[31].

The Resurrection narratives are an amazing story, to which there is no parallel elsewhere. But we have seen that Jesus was a unique personality, who cannot be compressed within ordinary human limits. We are not in a position to say positively of our own knowledge what can or cannot be true of Him. Therefore we cannot dismiss the story of His resurrection as impossible.

Read in conjunction with the story of His life it becomes at once less incredible than it would be were it told of any other historical personage. And if we accept it as true, at least in all its main features, then the subsequent course of events (which is not in dispute) begins to become intelligible. The rest of the New Testament has been written, and we have already examined the picture which it presents to us. The Christian Church has existed from that day to this, and its history is not writ in water.

Something suddenly transformed His followers almost beyond recognition. Something suddenly convinced them that the Cross is not a mark of defeat but a pledge of victory. The discovery that He was not dead but triumphantly alive would be sufficient to account for this. What other explanation can be regarded as being even conceivable? Either we must dismiss Christianity as an utterly inexplicable phenomenon (which amounts to dismissing human character and motive as a problem to which we have no clue of any kind whatever) or we must accept as true the one and only story which does provide us with an adequate explanation.

It is sometimes urged with much force that in view of its own theory as to its origin the Christian Church ought to be much stronger, nobler, and altogether more admirable than it is to-day, or ever has been. That is true; and the justice of the contention confirms the truthfulness of the Evangelists. For if the Gospel be fiction, then it was invented—as other stories have been invented from time to time [1]—to justify and account for an existing institution or state of affairs (in this case the Christian Church as a whole) which had come into being no one quite

[1] e.g. the *Fasti* of Ovid, the Decretals used by Pope Nicholas I, and perhaps some parts of the Pentateuch.

knew how, whose origins were so remote that they had become entirely forgotten.

But no one would be likely to invent an explanation which is over-adequate, and ought really to account for more than the phenomena which he was trying to explain. Indeed, if any one should even wish to do so, he would find the execution of his design impossible. It would be easier to write a convincing narrative of a voyage of discovery to lands which not only did not really exist in fact, but never had existed in the imagination of the author or of any other human being. No one can set himself to explain, account for, or describe more than he has seen or imagined.

For many English readers the question—*Who was Jesus?*—may seem to have been answered satisfactorily by the words which S. Mark and S. Matthew put into the mouth of the centurion at the foot of the Cross—*Truly this man was the Son of God.* Jesus had just died before his eyes, and the utterance is therefore invested with a peculiar dramatic force. It seems to be the climax up to which the whole story has been moving. Even the heathen soldier to whom it had fallen to carry out the sentence has had his eyes opened at last and has recognized what God would have all men see.

But we are apt to read into the words more than they really mean, because we bring to them all our Christian prepossessions. To us *The Son of God* means one very definite thing and one only. But in the mouth of a pagan *A Son of God* would necessarily amount to very much less. There might have been other figures in the past to whom he would have been equally ready to give the title. It need mean no more than such a phrase as *the man of God* does in the Old Testament, or as it might be applied by us to a great hero of our own time. Undoubtedly the centurion meant to pay a tribute to Him. But it was not, as the English Bible suggests, the tribute of Christian devotion.

S. Luke's version of the words runs—*Certainly this was a righteous man,* and there can be little doubt that this represents more accurately the centurion's meaning. It is possible that S. Luke deliberately altered what he found in S. Mark because

he knew that Christian readers would tend to exaggerate its significance.

There is no reason for supposing that the centurion became a Christian : and whatever he may actually have said he really meant no more than S. Luke makes him say.

No one can doubt that Jesus was a righteous man who was unjustly done to death. But the mere memory of a martyr could not be a foundation of sufficient strength to bear the whole weight of the Christian Church. Nor does any mortal martyr, however noble his life, and heroic his death, merit the language which is applied to Jesus in the Epistles : language which has been repeated by Christian devotion throughout the centuries, and has approved itself to the Christian conscience from that day to this.

The centurion's estimate of Him is indisputably true as far as it goes. But it does not go very far. It does not provide an adequate explanation of all that has been set in motion by the life and death of Jesus, nor of the picture of Him with which the Evangelists have furnished us.

The first three Gospels throw a good deal of light upon the problem which Epistles, *Acts*, and *Revelation* set us. They tell us more about Jesus than we knew before. But they do not fully explain or account for Him. They give us a very wonderful picture of the Prophet of Nazareth, unique in life, unique also in death, who could read and stir men's hearts as no other has ever been able to do. The more closely we study the portrait the greater does He appear to be. But even so the Figure which is held up before us is hardly commensurate with the results which His life has produced. We can see that His impact upon the world must needs have had a far-reaching effect. But could it have reached in ever-widening circles down to our own day ? He calls forth the love and admiration of all who read His story. But is there, or is there not, an element of what can only be called profane exaggeration in the language which is applied to Him by Christians : especially by S. Paul and by *Hebrews* ?

This is the point to which the first three Gospels bring us, and although they have cleared away some of our perplexities

they have, in doing so, raised other and even larger difficulties. They have made even more insistent than ever the question—*Who was Jesus?* And taken by themselves they do not afford an answer full enough to be perfectly satisfactory. The question may prove to be unanswerable. But if there be a full and final answer to be found anywhere it must be contained in the only canonical document which we have not yet explored.

VIII

THE FOURTH GOSPEL

THERE is probably no single document in the world which has engaged as much attention as has the Fourth Gospel. Opinions as to its date, authorship, and character differ very widely indeed. Some general agreement on these points may eventually be reached, but as yet it is not in sight.

By some the Fourth Gospel is regarded as being what on the surface it professes to be: namely a true historical record of our Lord's life. The standpoint from which the story is told is obviously different from that of the other evangelists, but the book is none the less trustworthy upon that account.

In other eyes the Gospel is nothing but a religious romance. Its spiritual value is very great, but its historical foundation is of the slightest. On this theory the closest parallel to it in English is such a work as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The only real difference between the two is that whereas Bunyan gave to his scenes and characters names which were obviously fictitious, so that his work could never by any possibility be regarded as anything but an allegory, S. John gave to his characters names which really had been borne by historical personages, such as Jesus and Peter, and staged his romance at real places—Galilee, Samaria, and Jerusalem. Thus while the Fourth Gospel shows us what religion meant to its author it adds nothing whatever to our knowledge of the historical Jesus. Read as a religious allegory it is extremely edifying: read as history it is entirely misleading.[1]

Between these two extremes various intermediate positions are possible, and are in fact held by scholars of eminence.

The literature relating to the Fourth Gospel[2] is now so extensive that to be thoroughly familiar with it all would be

[1] The most complete and thorough-going exposition of this view which I have read is M. Loisy's *Le Quatrième Évangile*.

[2] Which includes *1 John*. The First Epistle and the Gospel are beyond question by the same hand

almost the exclusive work of a lifetime. No summary of it can be attempted here.

But before we enter into the region of conjecture, before we begin to weigh conflicting theories, of which any one may conceivably be true, it will be worth our while to see what can be gathered for certain from the contents of the Gospel itself.

1. It is plainly the work of an old man. Chapter 21, verses 23 and 24 could only have been written by some one who had survived the incident by many years. This characteristic is even more conspicuous in the First Epistle. There the author speaks with a tone of authority such as could only be claimed by an old man, and obviously separates his own generation from that of all those whom he was addressing.[1]

It is tempting to conclude that he is claiming the pre-eminence which would naturally attach to the last survivor of those who had seen the Lord.

2. He never describes himself as an apostle. But he does profess to write as an eyewitness, or at least to be using the direct testimony of an eyewitness. His authority is the person who is described as *the disciple whom Jesus loved* or as *the disciple which beareth witness of these things*.

This disciple is particularly prominent during the closing scenes. He was present at the Last Supper. He stood by the foot of the Cross, and the Virgin Mary was entrusted to his care. He brought S. Peter into the High Priest's palace and accompanied him to the empty Tomb. He also figures in the last scene of all, by the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The most natural interpretation of these passages is that they are the writer's description of himself. It is, however, possible that he is referring to some other person from whom he had derived his information.

3. The Gospel contains a number of topographical details, which show that the author was familiar with the soil of Palestine, and especially with Jerusalem and its immediate neighbourhood.[2]

These details are not in themselves important. In a sense they add nothing to the story. It is just possible that they were deliberately invented by the author to give an appearance of

[1] 2^{12-14}, 5^{13}.

[2] 1^{28}, 3^{23}, 45, 5^{2}, 11^{18}, 18^{15}.

verisimilitude to what is in reality a work of fiction. But this theory is likely to commend itself only to those who have determined from the outset to explain away the historical character of the Gospel. If we accept them as true they are perfectly natural. They are exactly the kind of detail which would lodge in the mind of an observant eyewitness and recur to him when he came to write down an account of what he had seen.

We may therefore conclude that the source of the Fourth Gospel was a Jew of Palestine.

4. The Fourth Gospel was not written for Jewish readers.

In 6^4 we read *The passover,*[1] *the feast of the Jews, was at hand.* Unless we treat the words *the feast of the Jews* as the insertion of a later hand (which we have no reason for doing) we must conclude that the writer had in mind readers who knew nothing of the Jewish religion. A Jew who was writing for Jews would be as unlikely to insert them as a Christian writing for Christians would be to add the words *a Christian festival* to a reference to Easter.

Again in 10^{22} we read *And it was the Feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem: it was winter.*

The Feast of the Dedication was held at a time corresponding with the early part of December. Therefore it was always celebrated during the winter, as Christmas is amongst ourselves. The note as to the season could only have been intended for readers who were not familiar with the Jewish Calendar.

This bears out the idea that the Gospel was not written until very near the close of the first century. By that time the Temple had been in ruins for nearly a generation, and the national life of the Jews had come to an end. Ephesus, with which tradition connects the Evangelist,[2] was the capital of the Christian world, and the majority of Christians were Gentiles who naturally possessed no knowledge of what had been the customs of Jerusalem.

The Fourth Gospel has always been known as *the Gospel according to S. John,* and no other name has ever been suggested as that of the author. But as soon as we try to identify *John*

[1] Professor Hort doubted whether these two words were genuine (W. H. N. Test. vol. ii, ad loc.).

[2] e.g. Eusebius *H. E.* vi. 24, quoting Polycrates.

more particularly we find ourselves beset with difficulties and uncertainties.

It is natural to assume that he was the most famous *John* of whom we know: namely the brother of James and the son of Zebedee. This John was one of the three apostles who seem to have been on terms of peculiar intimacy with our Lord. He would therefore have been particularly well qualified to play the part of Evangelist. It is certain that this Gospel did not appear until some years after the other three. But the fact that it acquired immediately a position equal to theirs throughout the whole Christian world shows that it was believed to have emanated from an unquestionable source. Its rapid and universal acceptance becomes easier to understand if it were given to the world on the authority of an apostle; and not only that, but on the authority of one who had enjoyed a distinct pre-eminence amongst the apostles during our Lord's ministry, and had finally acquired the exceptional prestige which would naturally be accorded to the last survivor of those whom He had called His *friends*.[1]

It is difficult to account for the reception of the Gospel upon any other theory:[2] and from the time of Irenaeus,[3] at least, the Church has attributed the Fourth Gospel to John the Apostle.

From the third quarter of the second century down almost to the last quarter of the nineteenth this identification of the author was never seriously questioned. But of late grave doubts have been cast upon it. The traditional view is seen to be open to so many objections that if it cannot be dismissed as untenable, there is probably hardly a single scholar who would uphold it, without some reserve, to-day.

The arguments both for and against it have been set out in Professor Sanday's *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*[4] pp. 97–108, and a very brief summary of the principal points is therefore all that is required here.

[1] *S. John* 15[14].

[2] The author of the *Gospel of Peter*, who seems to have written between 115–40, could not leave it out of account though it militates very seriously against the view of the Person of Christ which he wished to maintain. (*The Study of the New Testament*, by C. H. Turner, p. 12. Clarendon Press, 1920.)

[3] Bp. of Lyons, died about 185.

[4] Clarendon Press, 1905.

The grounds of the traditional view, beside the fact that it is traditional, are too obvious to need recapitulation. What concerns us is to note what can be urged upon the other side. It is a sound principle of criticism that tradition is to be accepted, at least in broad general outline, unless some definite evidence to the contrary be forthcoming. (This principle has been singularly vindicated by archaeological research in many departments during the last fifty years: notably in respect to the Homeric account of the Trojan War.)

Christian tradition has assigned the Fourth Gospel to John the apostle the son of Zebedee. What reason have we for questioning the verdict?

In the first place, there is a tradition to the effect that John suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Jews: which means that he must have been put to death before A.D. 70. But the Fourth Gospel did not appear until at least twenty years after this date, and tradition asserts that the author died a natural death at Ephesus in extreme old age.

Secondly, there is an odd story to the effect that the blood of the High Priests ran in the veins of the Evangelist, and that in consequence of this he sometimes wore the High Priestly mitre.

It is hard to see why any one should have made such an improbable statement, unless he knew positively that it was true. And if true, it is hard to reconcile with the belief that the Evangelist was a Galilean fisherman. His father seems, indeed, to have been a man of some substance: but that is very different from saying that he belonged to one of the foremost families of the nation.

Neither of these traditions is, however, of much weight. And it is admittedly difficult to set aside the testimony of Polycarp. He was Bishop of Smyrna and was martyred in 156. He had been a disciple of S. John, and he appears definitely to have told his own disciple Irenaeus that John the Apostle and John the Evangelist were the same person. It is hard to see how Polycarp himself could have been mistaken on such a point, or how Irenaeus can have misunderstood what he had said.

Polycarp's statement would have to be counted quite decisive, were it not for certain features in the Gospel itself.

1. The author never calls himself an *apostle*. In fact his continual use of the word *disciple* suggests that he was careful to avoid the higher and more formal title.

Yet if he had been pre-eminent amongst the Twelve from the first, and were the last survivor of them all, we might expect some reference to these facts as the foundation of his authority. As his Gospel is admittedly very different from the other three it might be expected that he should vindicate clearly his title to correct or to amplify what his predecessors had written.

2. He appears to have been in close touch with the Sanhedrin, or at least with certain members of it. How else could he have learned what had passed between Christ and Nicodemus ?

And as the council which was convoked after the raising of Lazarus appears to have been entirely private, he must either have been present at it himself, or have received his information from a member of it.[1]

3. He was apparently present at the interview between our Lord and the Woman of Samaria, though it is implied that *His disciples* (which in this case presumably means the apostles) were not.[2]

4. He was well known, if not to the High Priest himself, at least to all his servants. He was able to enter the High Priest's palace freely and to bring with him any friend whom he chose.[3]

Yet there had been real fear lest the followers of Jesus should attempt a rescue if any violence were done to Him. He had been successfully arrested late at night, but prudence demanded that the fact should be kept as quiet as possible until He was in the inexorable grip of the Roman authorities. Common sense tells us that the High Priest's servants must have had orders to be very careful whom they admitted during that dangerously eventful night. Yet there was no question of refusing the Evangelist and his unknown Galilean friend.

He also knew the name of the servant whom S. Peter had wounded in the garden,[4] and recognized one of his relations afterwards.[5]

1 11^{47-53}. 2 4^{27}. 3 18^{15-16}. 4 18^{10}. 5 18^{26}.

5. His home was in or near Jerusalem.[1]

Of course if we dismiss the entire Gospel as a pious romance, as M. Loisy does, none of these points is of any special significance.

But if we admit that the Fourth Gospel contains even a *substratum* of historical fact, they touch the question of its authorship closely. It might be possible to explain any one of them away, but when they are taken together their cumulative weight is very great.

It is so hard to reconcile them with the position of a Galilean fisherman that we seem to be obliged to accept the theory, which, however, is not free from difficulties of its own, that the Evangelist was not the son of Zebedee.

There is one other advantage, beside those which appear from what has been written above, in assuming that the beloved disciple, who was the source of the Fourth Gospel, was not one of the Twelve. John the Evangelist is said to have lived into the reign of Trajan, which means until A.D. 98 at earliest. By that time an exact contemporary of our Lord would have been, as nearly as we can tell, one hundred and six years old.

We are told that when our Lord began His Ministry He was about thirty years of age,[2] and this is borne out by the Jews' comment when they understood Him to declare that He had seen Abraham. The natural meaning of their rejoinder is that He had quite obviously not reached middle life.[3]

Now in view of the responsibility which was to be laid upon the Apostles, it is unlikely that any of them were much younger than He. Some of them may have been a little older. We are probably safe in concluding that no member of the Twelve was under the age of twenty-five when he received his call. And therefore while it is not impossible that one of them should have lived until the year A.D. 98, it is not very likely that any one of them did.

But if the beloved disciple were not one of the Twelve this difficulty disappears. For we may then think of him as hardly more than a boy, ten or twelve years—possibly even fifteen—younger than his Master. Such a boy might have been admitted to the peculiar intimacy which his description of himself implies.

1 19^{27}, with *Acts* 1^{14}. 2 *S. Luke* 3^{23}. 3 *S. John* 8^{57}.

He might have had access to sources of information which were closed to the Twelve, and have remained by Jesus' side on occasions when they were absent. We cannot say that he could not have been present at the Last Supper, and he might well have been able to watch by the Cross because the fact that he was neither a Galilean, nor an accredited supporter of the Prophet of Nazareth, meant that he had nothing to fear from the Jewish authorities. And he might have lived until the year 98 without having reached an abnormal age.

Certainty on the point is beyond our reach, and objections can be urged against any theory which can be brought forward. But the suggestion that the beloved disciple was not one of the Twelve, and that he was some years younger than any of the apostles, seems to get us out of more difficulties and into fewer than any other which has yet been put forward. It is therefore on the whole to be preferred to the traditional view which identifies the Evangelist with the son of Zebedee. But the scales are so evenly balanced that the apostolic authorship cannot be dismissed as untenable.

But if we decide that the Fourth Gospel is the work of an eyewitness (or at least that it rests upon the testimony of an eyewitness) and that we are right to read it as history rather than as romance, that does not mean that all the problems which it raises are at an end. Even if we knew for certain who the author was the question would still remain—How far is what he has written what we understand by True History ?

It is generally admitted that the narrative here owes more to the Evangelist himself than it does in the first three Gospels. The Fourth Gospel is not merely a memoir of our Lord : it is also a devotional meditation upon His life. It did not appear in the form in which we have it until more than fifty years after the Incarnate Life had closed, and we have no reason to suppose that it had been committed to writing at any earlier date. It is the outcome of the reflections of a long life. It is the view which an old man had come to take of what he had seen and heard in early youth : and it is therefore probable that the story has been to some extent moulded and coloured by the writer's own thoughts. Indeed if we deny this probability we shall be

driven to adopt a very mechanical theory as to the meaning of *Inspiration*, which in the long run creates more difficulties than it removes.

There can be very little doubt that the Evangelist sometimes introduces his own meditations into the text, in such a way that they may easily be read as if they were the words of our Lord Himself. No doubt he did not intend them to be so taken. Verses 16–21 of Chapter 3 are a case in point, where we may say, if we like, that it is a matter of opinion whether the words are meant to be ascribed to our Lord or not.

(It may be worth while to remind English readers that ancient manuscripts know nothing of paragraphs, stops, or even of divisions between words ; still less of printers' devices such as inverted commas, which make a change of speaker plain.)

But any definite insertions which can be detected do not affect the character of the Gospel as a whole.[1] What concerns us is to decide whether the portrait of our Lord drawn here is or is not true to life.

Admittedly it differs very widely from the earlier picture drawn by the first three Evangelists. The point is—Is the difference so wide that one of the two portraits must be dismissed as incredible ? For if that should be so, there can be little doubt that the earlier portrait is the one which must be retained.

In the previous chapter it was urged that one ground on which we base our belief in the general truth of the story told in the first three Gospels is its astonishing character. The more carefully we study the lineaments of the Hero, the more difficult does it become to believe that He is a Hero of romance. It is hard to believe that such a life was ever lived, that there was ever a man who spoke and acted as He did. But it is still harder to believe that if there had not been, the picture which we in fact possess could ever have been drawn.

And whatever weight this argument possesses is increased

[1] e.g. The story of the woman taken in adultery (8[1-11]) which may very well be true, but does not belong to this Gospel. All the oldest manuscripts but one omit it and those which put it at the beginning of Chapter 8 mark it with an obelisk as being of doubtful authority. Eleven manuscripts put it at the end of *S. John's Gospel*, and four add it to Chapter 21 of *S. Luke*. It may be derived from the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*.

when we come to the Fourth Gospel. For here the characteristics of the earlier portrait, which make Him one with whom history offers no parallel, are even more strongly marked. The unerring insight into the deepest springs of human motive, the sympathy, the severity, the independence are all there. Above all there is the consciousness of His own unique relation to God, the intimacy of which has never been marred by any thought, word, or deed which could demand repentance. And by virtue of this intimacy His relation to mankind is unique also. He assumes for Himself a position which gives Him a right to speak as no other has ever done. Again and again we are driven to endorse the confession made by His enemies—*Never man spake like this Man*,[1] and *Behold the world is gone after Him*.[2] We, nineteen hundred years afterwards, feel the force of those statements and can judge their truth better than the men by whom they were first made.

Is it really conceivable that this portrait should owe more to the unknown artist than to the Model from which it has been drawn ? Are we not inverting what may be called the reasonable probability of the case if we insist on endowing the evangelist with genius sufficient to create what he has given us out of his recollections of a Master who was in reality something very different ? Put shortly and crudely—If the Christ of the Fourth Gospel be the creation of S. John, who or what was S. John ?

The difficulty of dismissing the portrait as unhistorical becomes most acute when we recall the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth chapters of the Gospel. They stand, for all who will to read : and what verdict can we pass upon them ? If we believe that we possess any powers of spiritual perception at all, if there be anything in us capable of responding in the least degree to God, if Conscience, Faith, Hope, and the Instinct to Pray mean or can mean anything whatever, then how can we but conclude that in these chapters we have the deepest and fullest revelation of the Heart of God which the world possesses ? If God has ever spoken to men through human lips He speaks here. If these words be not His, then mortal ears have never caught the faintest whisper of His voice. There is then no

[1] 7^{46}. [2] 12^{19}.

knowledge of Him within our reach, and no spiritual instinct of our own which we can ever dare to trust.

This conclusion we cannot accept unless there be no possible alternative. But we are only reduced to it if we choose to assume that the Fourth Gospel is from beginning to end a work of fiction, which reaches its climax in these chapters. But our reason for doing so really springs from nothing but a fear that the story told us is too good to be true. Admittedly, it is very difficult to believe it to be true; but not quite impossible. And it may be that the author had this difficulty, which he foresaw would be felt by his readers, in mind when he wrote in his 'covering letter': *God is greater than our heart.*[1]

If the Fourth Gospel were an isolated document, the problems which it raises would be in many ways even more acute than they are now. The difficulty of attaching any historical significance to it would be enormous. But it does not stand alone. It is part of the New Testament, and presents us with what professes to be a portrait of the Figure who pervades the Epistles and is sketched for us in the first three Gospels. The portrait is admittedly somewhat different. It is taken from a different angle, and is—if we like so to say—more advanced. But still it does profess to be a portrait of the Person in whose historical existence the earlier books of the New Testament constrain us to believe. And therefore it cannot be dismissed off-hand. Astonishing as the Fourth Gospel is, we are in honesty bound to approach it with a predisposition in its favour. It is—to say the least—much more reasonable to suppose that it rests upon a solid foundation of historical fact than that it does not. It is so difficult to relegate it to the region of romance that we should only be justified in doing so if there were any evidence, either internal or external, which enabled us to say that it *could* not be anything but a work of fiction. This there most certainly is not, and therefore we are entitled—it might be more accurate to say obliged—to bring to our reading of it the presumption that it is an historically trustworthy work.

The first and most obvious point in which it differs from the

[1] *1 John* 3^{20}. The Epistle may have been intended as a covering letter to the Gospel.

earlier Gospels is in the scene assigned to the greater part of our Lord's Ministry.

They place it in Galilee, and speak of one visit to Jerusalem only, at the very end of His life.[1] S. John seems to place the greater part of it in or near Jerusalem, with occasional withdrawals to Galilee, or other places remote from the capital. This is a discrepancy which we cannot reconcile. But that does not mean that it is really irreconcilable. It might present no difficulty whatever if we knew more than we do.

The Synoptic narrative cannot be a complete record, unless we reduce our Lord's Ministry to a few months only. If we hold that it covered more than three years there are considerable periods about which the three first Evangelists are silent. A writer who was acquainted with their books might well have set himself deliberately to fill the gaps which they had left, drawing for the purpose upon the first-hand personal knowledge which they did not possess. On this principle he would naturally have passed over those episodes in the history which in his opinion had already been treated with sufficient fullness.

If we read the Fourth Gospel as a deliberate attempt to supplement the first three, without in any way superseding them, the discrepancies in what may be called the setting of the Ministry become perfectly intelligible and cease to be important.

More serious is the alleged difference between the two portraits of the Central Figure. It is often urged that there is really no resemblance between the simple peasant-prophet of Nazareth and the mysterious, elusive, unearthly Figure which dominates the pages of S. John. The former is a real human being: the latter has been stripped of all genuinely human characteristics for the sake of investing Him with supernatural attributes. And the swift incisive moral teaching of Jesus has nothing in common with the argumentative discourses of the Fourth Gospel, in which it is alleged that he appears to aim at baffling His opponents more than at instructing them.

Certainly the two portraits are not identical. But is the difference between them really as wide as is sometimes assumed?

[1] Though *S. Luke* 13[34] may be held to imply that there had been other visits.

Our answer to this question must be, to some extent, a matter of personal opinion. In real life the same person may impress those who are brought into contact with him very differently, and similarly a written memoir may produce a different effect upon different readers.

But, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter, it is a very superficial reading of the first three Gospels which finds there no more than the simple peasant-prophet, whose pure enthusiasm was of too fine a quality for this evil world. And the last six verses of S. Matt. 11 are as thoroughly in the style of the Fourth Gospel as anything can be. Their presence where they stand forms a most significant link between the earlier and the later portraits of Christ.

Those who consider that S. John presents us with a non-human Christ seem to have forgotten that it is to the Fourth Gospel that we owe the picture of the Good Shepherd, which appeals to the heart of all believers as no other image of God has ever done. Its power is evinced by the fact that it inspired the first beginnings of Christian art.

The Fourth Gospel records for us our Lord's grief at the grave of Lazarus, which drew from the bystanders, *Behold how He loved him.* It also contains the story of His washing the disciples' feet, which no one who wished to exalt Him into something non-human could ever have invented. It alone makes mention of His thought for His mother when He hung upon the Cross. The instinct which has added the story of the Woman taken in Adultery to the Fourth Gospel is a true one, and a striking testimony to the human sympathy of Christ which S. John depicts. If a place had to be found for that story in the canonical Gospels, it is more appropriate to the Fourth than to any of the first Three. It is as untrue to say that there is nothing really human about S. John's Christ as to maintain that there is nothing really superhuman about the Jesus of the Synoptic story.

S. John's portrait is admittedly the more supernatural, if we may so say, of the two. It was also, admittedly, not drawn exactly as we have it now until many years after the Incarnate Life of our Lord had closed. It is the outcome of many years' pondering upon what had been seen and heard. But that does

not necessarily mean that it is in substance the less trustworthy. The significance of great events can never be fully grasped at once: just as the true proportions and real beauty of a great building, upon which our estimate of the architect depends, cannot be perceived while we are standing in its shadow. Contemporary events can only be chronicled, and it is of course worth while to do that as accurately as possible while they are still fresh in the memory of those who took part in them. A real history of them, that is to say an account which envisages properly their relation to each other and makes their real and permanent significance explicit, can never be produced until some considerable time afterwards.

And the more important the events, the longer the lapse of time required. To take the illustration which occurs most naturally in this year of our Lord 1922, it is unlikely that any one who fought in the late war will live long enough to read a real history of it. We do not yet see the various events in their true proportion and relation to each other. When our descendants do so their judgement of the whole, and of the leaders on both sides, may be very different from the one which we are inclined to pass now.

If the author of the Fourth Gospel, or at least the source from whom the actual author of the Gospel derived what he has written, possessed a full and first-hand knowledge of the events of our Lord's life, and of His teaching, he was really better qualified than the earlier Evangelists had been to write a true history of the Incarnate Life. Their knowledge was not first-hand, but seems to have been derived from memoirs—we might really call them notes—made not very long after the Ascension. In some details, especially as regards chronology, their chronicle may be more accurate. But S. John was in a better position to show what the Life and Death of the Prophet of Nazareth really mean to the world.

It is obvious that to write an account of a great man which shall furnish the world with a true picture of him demands a great deal of the writer. The biographer may be incapable of understanding his hero sufficiently to appreciate him, and in this case while his account may contain nothing which is actually

untrue it will be entirely inadequate.[1] The impression which it will produce upon the reader will be very much less than the whole truth: it may even be so much less as to be positively misleading.

Now whatever view we take ultimately of the Person of Jesus it is clear that He was very much greater than any of His disciples. He lived on a plane almost beyond anything which they could conceive. At times they struggled almost to His level, but again and again they fell back. Some remarks which they let fall showed how little they had understood His real mind and purpose. Much that He said and did, still more much of what He was, was beyond them altogether. The first three Gospels give us primarily the impression which He produced upon the peasants and fisher-folk of Galilee. No Christian doubts the great and permanent value of that portrait. But we may fairly ask, Is that all which could be said about Him?

If the author of the Fourth Gospel were not a Galilean peasant, but a man of very different antecedents and upbringing, who had nevertheless been admitted to particular intimacy with our Lord, his conception of his Master would naturally be very different. It is at least conceivable that he understood Him better than any of His other disciples, and in that case his portrait of Him, taken as a whole, may deserve to be counted the truest of all. We may hold that it brings out much which the world has need to know, but could never have learned from the earlier version of the story.

The Fourth Gospel has been written. It is not derived from any earlier documentary source which we can trace, and cannot be regarded as a mere summary of the common tradition of the Church. It is an independent phenomenon, for which we have to account as best we can. It gives us a portrait of Christ which differs considerably from that of the earlier Gospels but is not really incompatible with it. It is not antecedently impossible that S. John, having been an eyewitness, was in a better position to depict the Incarnate Life than were S. Matthew, S. Mark, and

[1] Compare the two portraits of Socrates drawn by Xenophon and Plato; and a study of them by A. E. Taylor (*Varia Socratica*, St. Andrews University Publications, James Parker & Co., 1911).

S. Luke, and that his own personal powers of apprehending what he had seen were superior to those of the authors of the sources from which the earlier evangelists drew. He was, when he wrote, further away from the events, and could bring to bear upon them the outcome of at least half a century of Christian meditation and Christian living. And therefore although the lapse of time may have blurred some minor details, and although he undoubtedly did to some extent read his own thoughts into the story, yet, taken as a whole, the essential truth of his portrait of Christ may deserve to be ranged above that of any other which we can ever possess.

In making our decision we must allow full weight to what we have been able to gather from other parts of the New Testament.

We have seen that the Epistles force upon us the question, *Who was Jesus?* Our estimate of their spiritual value, and our conception of the very nature of Christianity and of its claim upon us, depend upon the answer which we decide to return. But they provide no material for an answer. They only raise the question in the acutest possible form. The *Revelation of S. John* presents it again from another angle. *Acts* supplies, incidentally, a few details about Jesus and His Life, and sketches the process by which the Christian communities whose existence the Epistles reveal were brought into being. But as regards the main question it does little more than whet our curiosity.

The first three Gospels throw more light upon it. But they still leave the answer, as it were, in the air.[1] They furnish us with a chronicle (admittedly incomplete) of the Life of Jesus. They sketch for us a very wonderful Life. They leave no room for doubt that He was unique. But beyond this they hardly go. They still leave a margin of uncertainty as to the conclusion which is to be drawn from the story. And the width of this margin is attested by the fact that very different conclusions are drawn by readers of the story to-day.

The first three Gospels, taken by themselves, do not really

[1] S. Peter's confession in *S. Matt.* 16^{16} did not originally mean quite as much as it appears to us to mean. He recognized Jesus as *Messiah*. But that falls a long way short of S. John's conception.

quite account for the Church which started into life between the years 30 and 70 of our era, which caused the Epistles to be written and has grown steadily from that day to this. There is a real gap between their Hero and the Figure who has been, is, and always will be, the centre of Christian devotion in all ages and countries. They do not provide a full and final answer to the question upon which everything in the whole world turns, *Who was He?*

The importance of this question dwarfs that of any other which can ever be raised. And S. John has set himself deliberately to provide a full and final answer to it. We may refuse to accept his solution. We may prefer to say that no final answer is possible. But there is no doubt whatever as to what S. John intends the answer to be.

S. John is convinced that the Life of the Prophet of Nazareth was, is, nothing less than the Life of God Himself. In Him the Eternal Life, which is the source and stay of all the local fleeting manifestations of life with which we are familiar, has been for the first and last time revealed to mortal eyes as fully as the conditions of this world allow. Both before and since God has spoken to men as they were able to hear, and human life has been purified, strengthened, and enriched by the messages which He has given to His elect servants. But the Prophet of Nazareth was not one of these. God did not merely speak to men by Him, but gave them an object-lesson in Him. That lesson can never be superseded nor amplified. We advance, or may hope to advance, towards an increasingly deeper understanding of it. There is more in it than we have perceived as yet. But the change is in our spiritual and intellectual powers. The subject-matter of the lesson remains the same.

That is S. John's conviction, and his purpose in writing his Gospel is to bring his readers to share it. In other words, he is telling the story with a definite, deliberate, purpose. He is not merely chronicling a succession of events, whose connexion with each other is comparable merely with the unity imparted to a number of beads by the fact that they are all suspended from a single string. He is writing a history, with the object of making clear the true significance of the events with which

he deals. His intention is to leave no doubt in the mind of his readers what their attitude towards them ought to be.

His 'text' is given in Chapter 1 verse 14, *And the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us.* Those are the boldest and most far-reaching words which have ever been penned. They are a complete and final answer to the question, *Who was Jesus?* They do not admit of any conceivable addition. The rest of the Gospel is designed to show how it had become possible for S. John to write them, and to enable his readers for all time to share his conviction of their truth. They place a tremendous tax upon our faith, and the demand which they make upon our intellectual conception of God is no less, though less immediately obvious.

We who have been brought up as Christians have always been familiar with the idea of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Probably almost the first religious lesson which we ever received was that God sent His Son to live on earth as a man for our sakes. And when we were taught that, we were much too young to perceive any of the difficulties which it raises. To us then it seemed to be a perfectly simple and natural act on God's part; and if an illustration were wanted, one could easily be found in the expeditions undertaken by the Prince of Wales to places which the Sovereign cannot visit in person.

But when S. John wrote the words they were not so easy of acceptance as they appear to us. The theoretical difficulty which they raised was enormous. His possible readers were divided into two classes. They had been brought up either as Jews or as Pagans. If they had been Jews, the very centre of their faith had been uncompromising belief in the absolute unity of God. The Jews had worked their way to that belief slowly and with much difficulty. The Old Testament shows us how hardly it was won. But it had been won more than five centuries before our Lord's time. The catastrophe of the Exile had shocked the surviving remnant of the nation out of polytheism for good and all. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One* had long been irrefragably established as what may be called the First Article of the Jewish Creed. Therefore a Jew was not ready to admit that God had, or could have, any Son who could

become Incarnate. He would be disposed to conclude that Christianity taught either that the Father Himself had become Man (which is unthinkable in itself and at war with Jesus' own teaching) or that Jesus was a chief angel to whom the title *Son of God* was only given metaphorically, as a way of recognizing His pre-eminence. In either case he would have misconceived the nature of Christianity entirely.

On the other hand, a pagan had been accustomed to believe in a number of gods, many of whom were related to each other by family ties. Amongst them the heavenly father held a somewhat shadowy and by no means unquestioned primacy. His question would therefore be, Which of the various beings to whom the title *Son of God* might be given is supposed to have become man in this instance? And the incarnation of one out of several possibilities would not necessarily be an event of overwhelming and permanent significance. It might also easily be understood to have confirmed his ancestral polytheism.

The theoretical possibility of an Incarnation in the Christian sense had to be established before it could be worth while to attempt to prove that it had taken place in fact. In order that the rest of his Gospel might be intelligible, S. John was bound to furnish his readers with a new conception of God. This he does in the first five verses of Chapter 1, which prepare the way for what is to follow.

He takes for his starting-point a doctrine whose roots lie far back in the Old Testament.[1] The Jews had long been familiar with the idea of the creative energy of God going out into the world, and this Energy they were accustomed to call His *Word*. This conception bears the hall-mark of genuine inspiration in that it is capable of indefinite expansion.

The connexion between a speaker and the word which proceeds out of his mouth is as close as any can be. But the two are not absolutely identical, and no potency which may be ascribed to the word can detract in any way from the majesty of the speaker. As time went on there was a tendency to personify—or at least to half-personify—the Divine Word and to treat it as if it were, in modern phraseology, a distinct centre of

[1] *Isa.* 55^{11}; *Ps.* 33^{6}, 107^{20}, 119^{50}, ^{89}.

consciousness. Yet it could never be regarded as in any sense separate from God or as independent of Him.[1]

By pursuing this line of thought it was possible for S. John to arrive at a doctrine of God which should neither make the Incarnation absolutely impossible, nor comparatively unimportant. The Unity of God is maintained, but is something less rigid than Jewish thought had made it. His all-pervading creative energy is recognized, but His functions are not shared, as they were in pagan belief, with a number of approximately equal, independent, and occasionally rebellious divinities.

It might be possible to show that the ideas attaching to *Word* (*Memra* in Hebrew, *Logos* in Greek) developed differently in Hebrew and Greek lands. Amongst the former the conception helped to prepare the way for belief in Divine Incarnation: amongst the latter its set was in the opposite direction.

The point might repay careful investigation but lies outside the scope of these pages.

The prologue to S. John's Gospel expands any conception of God with which either Jew or Gentile were familiar. It preserves His Unity: it affirms an intimate connexion between Him and the visible created order, without in any way merging Him in it. If the operation of His Word has been such that *without Him was not anything made that was made*, there is no room left for the pagan conception of a number of semi-independent gods, each of whom is supreme over some particular department. And on this view of the nature of God and of His relation to the world the statement that at one given time and place *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* does not pass the bounds of what is rationally conceivable. At verse 6 of Chapter 1 we have reached a point at which it has become possible that the succeeding argument may be true.

In S. John's eyes the Incarnation of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth does not involve any eclipse of the divine glory. It is in itself a manifestation of that glory transcending any

[1] Notably in the writings of Philo, a Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, 25 B.C.–A.D. 50. He calls The Word *Son of God*, *First born Son*, and *Image of God*. It is probably not true that S. John borrowed directly from him; but both drew upon the same circle of ideas. Philo's conception is profoundly metaphysical whereas S. John's is not.

other which has ever been vouchsafed to men. And the story is told with the intention of bringing out this truth too. In Jesus we are meant to see not only the Word made Flesh, but also the glory which appertains to Him alone. Before we can do this it may be necessary to revise our ideas as to the real meaning of the word *Glory* and as to the attributes of it.

Thus S. John is throughout his Gospel maintaining a paradox. Or if that be thought an over-statement, he is intent upon bringing out what a careless reader of his narrative might very easily overlook. His object is to show that Jesus is not merely what He appears to be at first sight, and that the obvious interpretation which can be put on His words and actions is not the only one which they are intended to bear. We might write at the head of every chapter: *Notice to the reader. This means more than you imagine.* Again and again S. John shows how those who were brought into contact with our Lord tried to reduce the significance of His Person and teaching to something which could be contained within the circle of their preconceived ideas. But this He always makes impossible. He refuses to accept the interpretation which has been attempted, and with a few incisive words discloses to His hearers a new world of whose very existence they had never dreamed a moment before. The Synoptic Jesus lays down new and subversive principles of conduct: S. John's Christ enlarges the spiritual and intellectual horizon of every one with whom He has to do.

One illustration will be sufficient.

When Nicodemus approached our Lord with the words *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these signs that thou doest except God be with him,* he was paying what he regarded as a very generous tribute to Him. The power which He wielded could not be denied: and Nicodemus was quite ready to admit that it was derived from His peculiar intimacy with God. To this intimacy he wished to be admitted with a view to exercising like powers himself. And he did not see why there need be any difficulty in the way of attaining his desire. Jesus was obviously in possession of some secret which gave Him unique access to the ear of God.[1] This He could

[1] The belief that God is a power which can be worked by us for our

easily impart if He would. If He would whisper a few words—it might be no more than a single name—into the ear of His disciple, then Nicodemus would be able to exercise the same supernatural power.

Our Lord's reply, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God,* amounts, if we may venture to paraphrase it, to this: 'Your attitude towards the whole question is entirely wrong. Spiritual enlightenment cannot come by such means as you suppose. There is no secret of the kind which you have in mind which I could impart. The path of spiritual progress does not lie that way. It must begin for every one with a fundamental change of outlook.'

Nicodemus was genuinely surprised. He took our Lord's words in the narrowest literal sense: *How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?*

Given the premise the objection was perfectly legitimate. A physical rebirth is impossible: and if it were not there is no reason to suppose that it would bring with it a new character.

Our Lord rejoins: 'You have misunderstood my meaning. The new birth of which I speak is not physical but spiritual. What would be impossible physically is possible spiritually. Experience attests more than reason can explain.'

Nicodemus can only reply, *How can these things be?* Our Lord answers him with a gentle irony, from which, perhaps, a touch of humour is not very far away: *Art thou the teacher of Israel and knowest not these things?* 'You are a man to whom people look for spiritual guidance. Have you never grasped what manner of thing religion really is? You have many wonderful things to learn if you would be My disciple.'

This is the principle upon which S. John presents our Lord's life throughout.[1]

In the first four chapters he depicts Him as showing Himself to various representative individuals or classes at Jerusalem,

own ends if we happen to know the right formula (as we can use steam or electricity) is very ancient and widespread. Amongst the Jews it was often associated with knowledge of the Divine Name.

[1] Cf. *The Gospel of S. John,* B. F. Westcott (Cambridge University Press, 1881).

in Judea, in Samaria, and in Galilee in such a way as to sow the seeds of faith in those who were willing to make room for them in their hearts. His Presence might inspire the beginnings of faith, or it might provoke suspicion and mistrust. But in neither case could He be ignored. Those who saw and heard Him felt themselves increasingly compelled to make up their minds about Him one way or the other. If He were right, then religion was a far wider and deeper thing than they had imagined. It was not merely, or even chiefly, a matter of precedent.[1] It cannot be compressed for ever within the limits of time-honoured formulae, however valuable these may have proved in the past. It means a new fellowship with God (the very idea that any real fellowship with Him is possible for man was perhaps in itself a staggering novelty) to be achieved by new methods. It involves a complete transformation of character on the part of the believer and brings with it an enormous expansion of his spiritual horizon.

The Second Act, if we may so call it, deals with the growing and hardening opposition between Jesus and the Jews. Men begin to range themselves definitely either for or against Him. This process falls into three well-marked stages, each of which has its centre in a particular miracle.

1. The Healing of the Man at Bethesda (5^{2-9}).

This led to a technical violation of the Law, because the man who had been cured was seen carrying his bed on the Sabbath. This was unnecessary work, and was therefore not to be tolerated.

Our Lord met the objection by claiming for Himself the right to commit a technical violation of the Sabbath in virtue of His unique relation to God.[2] He dwells further upon His own unique position and prerogative in a series of discourses, which provoke fiercer and fiercer opposition on the part of the Jews.[3] One of them has for its occasion the Feeding of the Five Thousand, which is the only miracle recorded by all four evangelists.

2. The Healing of the Man born blind (9^{1-12}).

This causes the opposition to Jesus, which has hitherto been of a personal and sporadic character, to take shape in definite, concerted, constitutional action.

1 Cf. 4^{12}, 6^{31}. 2 5^{17}. 3 5^{19}–8^{59}.

The man whom He had cured was *cast out* [1] by the Pharisees. That is to say, he was expelled from the Jewish Church by its lawful accredited rulers. In Christian phraseology he was excommunicated. The act was in itself a legitimate exercise of authority. The only question was whether the ground of it were a valid one or not. The man was cut off from the society of the faithful merely because he had received a benefit at Jesus' hands, and avowed himself His disciple.

This meant that Jesus and His followers could no longer hope to rank as a reforming party within the Jewish Church, as the Pharisees had been in origin and still were in name. The highest religious authority in the land had declared that there was no room for them within the covenant. From henceforth a definite and final choice must be made. It must be Jesus or Moses, for the Pharisees would not allow it to be both.

At this point therefore in S. John's narrative the new Society comes into being. Its relation to its Head is sketched in the allegory of the Good Shepherd. It is not to be held together as it were forcibly, by a containing ring-fence of Law, but is to be linked to its Leader by the indissoluble bands of mutual knowledge. He knows His sheep by name, and they know His voice. And He wins their unfaltering devotion by His unlimited sacrifice of Himself.

3. The Raising of Lazarus (11^{1-44}).[2]

This could not be ignored, nor could its significance be explained away. The effect of the miracle was so great and so immediate that it precipitated the crisis. In the face of this it was clear that excommunication would neither deter Jesus Himself, nor cause His followers to melt away. Accordingly the Chief Priests and Pharisees decided that there was no course open to them save to put Him to death. All that now remained was to find a convenient opportunity of executing their design.

This came sooner than might have been expected. Jesus came up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, and thereby put Himself in His enemies' power.[3]

[1] 9^{34}.

[2] The difficulty of regarding the story as a piece of literal history is admittedly great. But it seems to me that the difficulty of regarding it as anything else is even greater.

[3] 11^{47-57}.

The earlier Evangelists' account of the Crucifixion presents Jesus to us as the unquestioned Captain of the noble army of martyrs. But they leave us in doubt as to whether He were, or could be, anything more. S. John, true to the original text [1] on which his entire Gospel depends, represents Jesus as conscious that His death is of more than temporary or local significance.[2] It is not a mere incident, parallels with which might be found elsewhere. It marks the definite conclusion of a purpose which is not of human origin. If by His death all things were finished that the Scripture might be accomplished, then it stood in a unique relation to what God had revealed of His will for mankind. The words *It is finished* meant more than they could ever have done on any other lips. This view of His death is both unintelligible and profane if He were merely one of the sons of men. But if S. John were right in his original thesis, if He were in very deed the Eternal Word made flesh, the significance of His death must be unique. What other interpretation of it could be adequate ?

Similarly S. John's account of the Resurrection makes the triumph over death more immediately apparent.

In the first three Gospels the prevailing note is the astonishment of the disciples at finding that He was after all alive. Except for the last verse of S. Matthew the First Gospel makes no attempt to indicate the permanent significance of the Resurrection. We cannot tell what the original ending of S. Mark may have contained, but it is unlikely that it was more explicit. In S. Luke our Lord shows that His death was in accordance with the teaching of the Scriptures. But further than this He does not go. In the first three Gospels the Resurrection is presented to us simply as an astonishing event. Its meaning to the world is not explained.

Here again S. John fills in the space which the earlier narrative has left blank. Jesus Himself appears to Mary at His tomb, and as soon as she has recognized Him He makes it clear to her that He has not merely escaped or evaded death. He has not come back to life to be exactly what He was before. The intercourse which the Passion had interrupted was not to be resumed upon the old terms.

[1] 1^{14}. [2] 19^{28-30}.

Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go unto My brethren and say unto them I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.[1]

There is still more to come than has been revealed as yet. Here He makes for Himself a claim transcending anything which His followers had heard from Him before. He has not only revealed God to man, so that it is true to say, *He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.*[2] Henceforth, in a new and, if we may so say, more effective fashion, He is to be in His own Person the bridge spanning the gulf between man and God. He—not His teaching only, but He Himself—is the clue to the search which has engrossed the finest spirits all the world over ever since men first began to think at all.

The appearance to the assembled disciples in the evening strikes the same note. *As the Father hath sent Me even so send I you.*[3] Their relation to Him is indistinguishable, inseparable from His own relation to the Father. He is the link between God exalted in heaven and man struggling and suffering upon earth. Through Him the Life and Power of the very Godhead flow into men. Through Him men can henceforth receive of God as they have never been able to do before. On this, the unique spiritual position of the risen Jesus, S. John makes the Christian Society depend. It is not merely an aggregate of people who have been impressed by His teaching and propose to try to carry it out in practice. It is a body of men who both corporately and individually have been brought into a new and special relationship with God through Him. They are to play a supernatural part in the world. For this they have divine authority and can rely upon divine power—because Jesus is what He is.[4]

The claim which Jesus makes for Himself must always be a strain upon human faith. No loftier claim can ever be made on his own behalf by any living being. And its import is so tremendous and extends over a field so vast that it cannot be accepted lightly. If we accept it at all, we are bound to stake everything that we are, or can ever hope to become, upon it.

And therefore it is not wonderful that S. Thomas hesitated. Perhaps he saw more clearly than the others what it would mean

[1] 20[17]. [2] 14[9]. [3] 20[21]. [4] 20[22-3].

if he assented to what they had told him. He had shown already that he was willing to face death at his Master's side.[1] We cannot charge him with any lack of courage and devotion.

But now courage of a different kind was needed. The demand was for courage to face what can only be described as an intellectual revolution. The disciples were still far from having grasped the conception of our Lord's Person with which we have always been familiar. The Nicene Creed was still far in the future, and the faith of which it is the outcome and expression had at this moment hardly begun to dawn upon the horizon.

If the claim which the Risen Jesus made for Himself were accepted it meant that He was more, far more, than His followers had realized as yet. His significance must be universal and eternal, and bore to any ideas which had been attached to the word *Messiah* a relation comparable with that borne by the sea to a tiny wayside brook. It was necessary for them—even now—to recast their habitual thoughts of Him. And this carried with it the need of recasting almost everything which they had ever believed of God.

If S. Thomas had hesitated once, he was the first to rise to the height of the new demand. The words *My Lord and My God* [2] mark his acceptance of the claim, and of everything which went with it. They are the highest title which human lips can bestow, and therefore belong to the Most High God alone.

The common religious instinct of all mankind affirms this. But to a Jew even more than to any one else had it been for centuries utterly unthinkable that such language could be held of any save One. *There is one God, and there is none like Him* was the rock upon which the whole structure of Jewish faith and piety had been reared. If it were right to say *My Lord and My God* to Jesus, then it meant that whatever piety, devotion, and gratitude can prompt us to say of God is to be said no less of Him. He is not one of God's creatures, but His equal. His rightful place (we are necessarily reduced to metaphor) is at God's right hand, exalted to the head and centre of the spiritual order, and the worship which is due to God Himself is due no less to Him.

[1] 11[16].

[2] 20[28].

This, according to S. John, S. Thomas had seen. It is his object to bring every one of his readers to see it for himself, and to repeat S. Thomas's confession from the very bottom of his own soul. The conclusion to which the entire Gospel has been directed, which follows on the acceptance of the original 'text', has now been reached, and the Evangelist brings his narrative to a formal close.[1]

S. John writes throughout with a definite purpose. His *thesis* is that the Creative Energy of God, whose consistent operation can be traced with varying degrees of distinctness throughout the entire field of history, has been fully, intensely, vividly manifested in the human life of Jesus. Therefore Jesus is entitled to the worship which has hitherto been reserved for God alone, because He—in a sense we may say *He too*—is God.

How this could be he does not attempt to explain. He is concerned only with affirming the fact.

What may be called a complete theory of the Incarnation will probably always be beyond us. We do not know enough, either about God or about ourselves, to be able to say exactly *how* God could become Man. The efforts to furnish a theory which pressure of controversy has compelled the Church to make in the past have been, perhaps, too rigidly logical to be entirely satisfactory. The phrase which we have agreed to accept, *Two Natures in one Person,* is probably more valuable for the defence which it provides against erratic speculation than for the positive truth which it contains.

If we take the Fourth Gospel exactly as it stands we cannot deny that S. John has proved his case. He has succeeded in painting a Figure which so entirely transcends ordinary humanity that It really cannot be anything but what he declares It to have been. We cannot conceive anything more Godlike, and if anything which can possibly be called Religion is to exist in any shape or form whatever, we are bound to hold that the highest conception of God of which we are capable is a true conception : albeit less than the whole truth. And it is obvious that whatever of honour and worship may be due to God is

[1] Chapter 21 appears to be of the nature of an appendix. Its composition may be separated by a few years from that of Chapter 20.

due equally to the most Godlike Figure which we can conceive.

But the question is—Does the portrait which S. John has succeeded in drawing correspond with the objective reality of any life which he really witnessed? Or is it chiefly a product of his own imagination, so that its connexion with the historic life of Jesus is really only nominal?

Admittedly the Fourth Gospel as we have it now, owes something to the personality of S. John. Exactly how much it is impossible for us to say: but it may be more than any of the first three Gospels owe to their authors. S. John may be said to have dramatized the story of Jesus in order to bring out what he believed to be its real and lasting significance. Throughout the earlier part of his narrative he has, perhaps, dealt very freely with the material with which his memory supplied him. He has left out many incidents which he might have included, and has laid particular weight (more in all probability than appeared to attach to them at the time) upon those which he has selected in support of his argument. He has also, possibly, paid less attention to chronological accuracy than a modern European writer would have felt bound to do.

He has given a full and final answer to the question—*Who was Jesus?* He has also left no room for doubt as to what is to be the attitude of mankind towards Him. If S. Thomas had not said *My Lord and My God,* we should feel, when we had reached the end of the Gospel, that that and nothing else is what we ought to say. But we should not have had the courage to say it if the apostle had not done so first. But is S. John's answer the right one? Or has he transformed the Jesus of history beyond all recognition because he was determined to read into His life a significance which it does not really possess?

Those are very insistent questions which we cannot put away. And if we refuse to face them frankly we have revealed the weakness of our own faith. It cannot be said too plainly that the timidity which refuses to investigate for fear lest the results should be distasteful and disturbing has no more in common with faith than light has with darkness. The Charter of Christian Faith is given to us by S. John himself—*Ye shall know the truth,*

and the truth shall make you free.[1] Our concern is with the truth, whatever it may be : and with nothing else.

Admittedly S. John writes with a definite theory which has moulded and coloured his work from beginning to end. But this does not necessarily discount the value of what he has written.

It is said to be an axiom with students of natural science that to observe profitably it is necessary to have a theory. Of course if, as the study advances, the original theory prove untenable it must be discarded in favour of something which promises to prove more adequate. But at each stage of the investigation the starting-point must be a theory.

Now if that be true in natural science, which is the most impersonal of all studies, it must be at least equally true of the study of human character. An historian ought not to have any preconceived theory about the events with which he is dealing. But he cannot be content with merely recording them. He must aim at interpreting what he narrates. And if he is treating a number of events in relation to some given person he must, if his work is to be of any real value, have some theory about that person.

It would be impossible to write a satisfactory biography of any one without some definite theory as to his character and motives. Otherwise no distinct picture would be possible. And the greater the hero the greater the need of such a theory.[2] Of course if the theory be false the biographer will have failed completely. His presentation of his hero will bear no relation whatever to the man as he really was. But this risk the writer must face, because without running it he cannot hope to succeed.

Ordinary men and women are swayed by mixed motives. Their characters are woven of a number of different strands. Some of these strands are noble and admirable : others are not. We are not invariably consistent or true to our best selves, and this fact a biographer must bear in mind. When he has formed

[1] 8^{32}.

[2] e.g. it is impossible to understand the career of Cardinal Wolsey unless we realize that he was before all things a patriot, who was determined to make England great. Lord Acton could not, apparently, understand patriotism as a compelling force, and this fact affects his estimate of Wolsey very deeply. *Historical Essays and Studies*, vol. i, (Macmillan, 1908).

his theory of the character which he proposes to depict he must remember that certain episodes in his hero's life will not be in perfect keeping with it. He must allow for such variations, otherwise his finished picture will not be true to life. He must not lean upon his theory with more weight than it can bear.

But the greater his hero, the less will these variations be. For greatness means—or at least contains—purity of motive and single-minded consistency of character. Therefore the more truly admirable the person whom the historian is trying to depict, the more important does his theory of him become. For if the theory be true in itself, and large enough to be adequate, it will then bear a very great deal of weight indeed. It will cover almost the whole area of the hero's life, and will furnish the key to almost everything which he ever said or did.

Now it is universally recognized that Jesus was, to say the least, a man of quite exceptional nobility of character and purity of motive. Throughout the whole of His public life His consistency was extraordinary. Neither popularity nor opposition could ever deflect Him one hair's breath from the course which He had chosen. Therefore in the life of Jesus His biographer's theory will rightly count for more than it could if he were trying to depict a more normal character. S. John is entitled to bear upon his theory with quite exceptional weight because Jesus was such that one theory may cover His entire life completely: one explanation may be the master-key to everything which He ever said and did. And a unique theory will presumably be required to cover what is admittedly a unique life.

If S. John's theory, that in Jesus the Eternal Word became Flesh, be false, then his portrait of Jesus does not correspond with any objective reality which he or any one else ever witnessed. It is completely and utterly misleading. The pressure of his theory has transformed the Prophet of Nazareth into an unearthly being in whom none of the apostles could have recognized their Master.

But if it be true—then S. John has seen more than any other disciple. His symbol may well be the eagle because his gaze has pierced through much which other eyes could not penetrate.

He understood His Master best of all. His Gospel reveals Him as He really was, and is the most faithful portrait of Him which we can ever possess.

The question *What think ye of Christ?* is raised again in its acutest form by S. John. He raises it deliberately, because he intends to provide the answer. And the answer with which he furnishes us is intended to be absolutely final. It admits of no qualification or addition of any kind. We may accept it or reject it, but that is all that we can do. And our decision is of such moment that all other decisions of any kind which we can ever be called upon to make sink into insignificance by its side.

Collectively the Church has accepted S. John's answer from that day to this.[1] But as in the last resort no man may make agreement unto God for his brother the final decision must be made by each for himself.

Final, conclusive proof either way is impossible. If it were not, Christianity could not be a religion. It might be many things, but it could not be something in, by, and for which men and women can live and die. For a religion which does not demand Faith and Courage of its disciples is no religion at all. Religion if it be of God must be such that it calls for unflinching courage and undaunted faith. Courage to run the risk of staking everything upon what we cannot prove, faith to reach out towards what still eludes our certain grasp.

But while proof is rightly impossible this much may be said.

If S. John be right, then his theory does make the rest of the New Testament intelligible. It also covers the continued existence of the Church.

We have seen from the Epistles how men who were not Jews by race, who knew and cared nothing in the ordinary way for what might have been done in Judea when Pontius Pilate was governor, had come to look upon the Jesus, whom their eyes had never seen, less than fifty years after the Crucifixion. And we have seen how what they believed of Him constrained them to a new way of living. The new life was almost beyond their

[1] And it is unlikely that the Fourth Gospel would have been accepted as rapidly as it was if its portrait of Christ had been felt to be altogether at variance with the common tradition of the Church about Him.

strength: there were disastrous failures. But still they persevered.

We have seen how to the author of the *Apocalypse of S. John* this same Jesus reigns in heaven and on earth, and how the omnipotent Roman Empire will endure as long as He wills—and no longer. It embraces all known lands and seas and is buttressed by generations of almost superhuman power and glory. But its might is but a shadow. The real power is already in the hands of Jesus and His disciples.

We have seen in *Acts* how these beliefs were spread from place to place by a small but ever increasing band of indomitable men and faithful women. But how did they arise in the first instance? Upon what did they rest? How was it that their amazing extravagance did not bring about their almost instantaneous dissolution?

That is the problem which the New Testament sets us. If we reject the theory of the Fourth Gospel, where can we look for any solution?

The same problem is set us, in more extensive if less vivid form, by the Church of later history. We are all aware that it has never lived up to its own ideals. At times it has fallen so far below them that its recovery might well have been thought impossible. But it always has recovered; it still exists, and year by year its influence extends more and more widely. And to-day men are looking to it, half wistfully, half hopefully, as they have not done for nearly fifteen hundred years, as the sole hope of a half ruined and half despairing civilization. That is a fact for which we have to account as best we may.

Christian devotion and Christian living may be compared with the two sides of an arch which spans the world. Again and again they have shown themselves proof against all assaults. Therefore we know that there must be a keystone at the crown where they converge. And if that keystone were not strong and solid, the arch would have collapsed long ago. The Fourth Gospel provides the keystone which we need. If it be true that in Jesus the Eternal Word became Flesh, then the stability of the Christian arch can be understood. If not, we must dismiss it as an utterly inexplicable phenomenon.

That is as near to formal proof as we can come. It is as near as we ought to desire to come. But the experience of countless thousands assures us that if we will try, humbly, patiently, perseveringly to live the Christian life, drawing upon the inspiration which Christian devotion alone can supply, then we may hope to win little by little to an inward conviction which is worth more than proof. This conviction needs no argument, because it admits of no question. It is incommunicable because it may be attained by all. It is the Divine Secret into the knowledge of which the Holy Spirit is waiting to guide every soul which is willing to follow.

APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

1 Thessalonians	Oct. 51
2 Thessalonians	Nov. 51
Galatians	June 53
1 Corinthians [1]	Spring of 55
2 Corinthians	Sept. 56
S. James	about 56
Romans	early in 57
Philippians	Nov. 60
Ephesians	early in 62
Colossians	early in 62
Philemon	early in 62
1 Timothy	early in 63
Titus	late in 66
Hebrews [2]	66
2 Timothy [3]	Summer of 67
1 S. Peter [4]	68
S. Mark's Gospel [5]	69
S. Matthew's Gospel	70
S. Luke's Gospel	70
Acts	71
2 S. Peter	about 90
S. Jude	about 90

1 It seems probable that S. Paul wrote in all four letters to Corinth. See Chapter III, p. 69.

2 The Jewish War broke out in May 66. In October, Cestius Gallus was defeated at Beth-Horon. But all except a few fanatics foresaw that a duel with Rome could have but one end. The Christians at Jerusalem fled to Pella on the east of the Jordan, and it became necessary to choose definitely and finally between the Law and the Gospel.

3 S. Paul's martyrdom probably took place towards the close of 67.

4 The date of the apostle's martyrdom is uncertain, but it was probably not long after that of S. Paul.

5 S. Mark's Gospel appears to be virtually *The Gospel according to S. Peter*. But it is uncertain whether it was composed shortly before or shortly after the apostle's death.

Revelation of S. John [1]	about 94
2 S. John	about 95
3 S. John	about 95
S. John's Gospel	about 98
1 S. John [2]	about 98

These dates are necessarily to some extent conjectural, and high authorities can be cited for or against almost any year to which any book of the New Testament can reasonably be assigned. But there can be little doubt that the order of the books is pretty much in accordance with the above list. Absolute certainty is unattainable.

The margin of uncertainty is least in respect of the writings of S. Paul. For them I have followed the chronological table given at the end of Professor David Smith's *The Life and Letters of S. Paul.*[3] The noteworthy point, which may easily escape the ordinary Church-goer, is that all S. Paul's Epistles (with the possible exception of *2 Timothy* [4]), *James*, and *Hebrews* were written before our earliest Gospel. The most controversial date is perhaps that of S. Luke's Gospel, which carries with it the date of *Acts*. We should naturally be disposed to assign it to the period of S. Paul's first imprisonment at Rome (March 60–March 62) to which point *Acts* brings the story. But this appears to be precluded by its obvious dependence upon *S. Mark*. S. Mark's Gospel probably did not appear until after S. Peter's death, which almost certainly took place after that of S. Paul.[5]

For the same reason we cannot assign to S. Matthew's Gospel a date as early as its contents seem to suggest.[6]

[1] The *Revelation of S. John* may be by more than one hand. In any case the visions which it records may have been spread over a number of years. Some of them may relate to the reign of Nero (54–68). But the book as it stands now can hardly have appeared before the latter part of the reign of Domitian (81–96).

[2] Possibly written as a 'covering letter' to the Fourth Gospel. See Chapter III, p. 92.

[3] Hodder & Stoughton, 1919.

[4] If S. Mark's Gospel appeared before the death of S. Peter.

[5] Persecution always strikes first at a few leaders, in the hope that their removal will produce the desired result with as little bloodshed as possible. When this policy has failed the obscurer offenders are hunted down. S. Paul as a Roman citizen who had exercised his right of appeal to the Emperor, and had been tried and acquitted at Rome (*2 Tim.* 4[16]), must have been a much more prominent personage in the eyes of the Government than S. Peter, who had done nothing to attract official attention. S. Paul would naturally have been one of the first members of the Christian Community at Rome to suffer.

[6] It appears to have been written primarily for Jews, with a marked

The narrative of *Acts* ends in a way which makes it virtually certain that the author contemplated another volume.[1] This would presumably have contained the account of S. Paul's first trial and acquittal, of his journey to Spain [2] (which may have included a visit to Gaul), and of his second trial and death. But if this book was ever written, all trace of it, except for one passing reference in the *Muratorian Fragment* (see Chapter II, p. 46 *n.*) has completely disappeared.

The epistle of S. James may be ascribed with a high degree of confidence to *James the Lord's Brother*,[3] surnamed *The Just*. He was stoned in 62.[4]

The doubt as to whether *2* and *3 John* are by the author of *1 S. John* and the Fourth Gospel does not materially affect their date. In any case they are obviously among the latest books of the New Testament.

It is assumed in the above table that *2 S. Peter* and *S. Jude* are not by the apostles whose names they bear.[5]

APPENDIX B

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

So much has been written about the Birth of Christ that it is unnecessary to speak of it at any great length here. But as the traditional belief of Christendom is widely challenged to-day, the matter cannot be passed over in silence.

Our principal authority for the belief is *S. Luke* 1^{26-45}. The parallel passage in *S. Matthew* should possibly not be counted

bias against the Pharisees. If Papias's treatise *On the Words of our Lord* should ever be discovered it might throw much light on many questions connected with this Gospel.

1 cf. *Acts* 1^{1}. *The former treatise* can be nothing but S. Luke's Gospel, and the word used rather suggests *the first of three*.

2 We know from *Rom.* 15^{28} that the apostle intended to make this journey, and the language of S. Clement of Rome implies that it was accomplished. Writing from Rome to the Church of Corinth about A.D. 95 he says that S. Paul went ' to the limit of the west '. S. Paul's journeyings must have been a matter of common knowledge less than thirty years after his death, and S. Clement could hardly have used such language if he knew that the apostle had never been west of Rome. No one writing from Leeds to London would call Leeds ' the extreme north of England '.

3 *Gal.* 1^{19}.

4 By order of Ananias the High Priest. (Josephus Ant. xx. 1.) See Chapter III, p. 72.

5 See Chapter III, pp. 88, 89.

as independent testimony. S. Luke records the story as it was, or might have been, told by Mary; showing here, as in several other passages of his Gospel, special traces of the influence of women. S. Matthew's narrative is perhaps no more than a literary recasting of S. Luke's (or of the source upon which S. Luke drew) into the form in which the story might have been told by Joseph.

There is no reference to the Birth of Christ in *S. Mark*, *S. John*, or *Acts*. In the Epistles there is only one passage which can be considered to have any bearing upon it. In *Gal.* 4^4 S. Paul writes—*but when the fulness of the time came God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law*. But the interpretation which makes these words support the belief that Christ was born of a Virgin is unnatural and strained. The general context of the passage rather implies that S. Paul thought that He was born in the normal way.

The application of *Rev.* $12^{1\text{-}6}$ to the question does not deserve to be taken seriously.

It would therefore seem that the belief that Christ had no human father did not form any part of the earliest Christian preaching, and was not public property in the Church until after the year A.D. 60.

Now the story told by S. Luke is either true or false. The point is one which necessarily never did or could admit of proof: and it is very unlikely that any fresh evidence with regard to it will ever be forthcoming. Any decision upon it which we may reach must therefore be based on grounds of what may be called general probability. It must be to some extent a matter of opinion, and absolute unanimity on the point is not perhaps now to be expected.

As a preliminary, it must be borne in mind that belief in the Virgin Birth of Christ is not the same as belief in the Incarnation, nor even necessary to it. If any man ever believed that Jesus of Nazareth was in very truth what the Christian Church as a whole now believes Him to be, S. Paul did so. The greater part of S. Paul's life was devoted, with almost superhuman energy, to spreading this belief as widely as possible, and to resisting all attempts to explain it away. Yet he certainly never appealed to the Virgin Birth as even one of the grounds upon which his own belief rested. Personally I believe that if he ever knew of it it was not until his active life was drawing to a close. The theory that the Virgin Birth was necessary 'to cut off the entail of sin' is quite untenable, because it is

a fact that we inherit as much, in every way, from our mothers as from our fathers. If we commit ourselves to the view that a man without sin *could* not have been born of two mortal parents in the ordinary way, we have merely set ourselves a new problem—How could He have been born of one?

The only solution along these lines is the logical fiction of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. This was raised to the rank of an article of faith by Pope Pius IX in the year of our Lord 1854. This, at most, only places the difficulty a generation farther back. It is hard to see how similar dogmas relating to the entire ancestry of Mary from the beginning of the world can eventually be avoided.

It is sometimes urged that belief in the Virgin Birth has had an unfortunate effect both upon popular theology and upon ecclesiastical practice. And the charge is not without foundation.

It may be true that there are some who, if they were required to put their belief into words, would say that Jesus is both God and Man because He was born of the Holy Ghost and a mortal mother. That looks like what might be described as 'the common-sense view of the plain man'. But a hybrid—be it said with all possible reverence—is not what either of its parents is. If Jesus be regarded as an Intermediate Being, half-way between God and Man, deriving something from both, the doctrine of the Incarnation comes to the ground. We have substituted for it a view which in slightly varying forms has been pressed upon the Church from time to time in the past, and has always been uncompromisingly rejected.[1]

Mistaken views as to the real function and value of asceticism, coupled with the idea that marriage is a concession rather than a vocation, which have acquired considerable currency in the Church in the past, and are perhaps not quite dead yet, may be in part attributable to the same source.

But the fact that a belief has been widely held to justify conclusions which ought not in reality to be drawn from it, does not touch the question of its inherent truth or falsehood: any more than the virtue of industry is discounted by the fact that some people make a very bad use of the money which they earn.

If S. Luke's story be false we must try to find a motive for the invention of it. And there appears to be a very simple and obvious one ready to our hand.

[1] The most famous of these attempts was made by Arius in the fourth century. The Nicene Creed is the Church's answer to him, and the most enduring monument of the controversy.

Christian piety, it is said, wished to throw a halo round the person of Jesus in every possible way, and it was thought that His supernatural character would be more firmly established if He were born in a supernatural way. So the legend arose; in part, perhaps, as a half-unconscious instinctive tribute to Him, paid by those who had never seen Him personally.

But plausible as this theory sounds, it is open to very serious objections.

1. Nothing, as we have already seen, could enhance the estimate of Jesus which S. Paul formed, to the propagation of which he devoted his life. S. Paul certainly did not base his conviction upon any belief that He was supernaturally born, and therefore, those who received their Christianity from him cannot have done so either. When the legend reached their ears it would not have made their Master one whit more wonderful in their eyes. Nothing which could be added to S. Paul's teaching about Jesus could magnify Him in any way.

2. It was not a concession to Jewish prejudice, which, as we see from *Acts*, was the most formidable obstacle which the Gospel had to meet during the first generation. It was no part of Jewish belief that Messiah should be born of a virgin.[1] The assertion that Jesus had no human father would merely have been one more obstacle in the way of the acceptance of Him as Messiah by the Jews.

3. When the Gospel had spread to the Gentile world the story would have been an even greater impediment. Heathen mythology furnished parallels of a uniformly discreditable character. The uniqueness of Jesus would be impaired rather than enhanced by anything which seemed to bring Him into line with stories which every one knew perfectly well already. It also laid the Church open to the charge, which was in fact brought and may sometimes be heard at our street corners to day—On your own showing your Master was born of fornication.

It is, in fact, easier to see motives which might have led to the suppression of the story than to imagine any which were likely to have inspired it.

4. S. Luke tells us that he made careful investigations before

[1] The word translated *virgin* in *Isa.* 7^{14} means no more than *a young woman*. It had never inspired any belief that Messiah would be born of a virgin, but its appearance in *S. Matt.* 1^{22-3} shows that when the First Gospel was written the belief that Jesus had been so born was generally accepted by the Church. The quotation raises two large and intricate questions, of which the first concerns the nature and function of Prophecy in general, and the second the use of the Old Testament in the New. It would be out of place to attempt to discuss either here.

writing his Gospel, and it has been pointed out in Chapter VI that whenever we are in a position to test him as an historian his standard of accuracy proves to have been exceedingly high. It is therefore, to say the least, unlikely that he would have lightly incorporated in his Gospel anything which he did not feel convinced rested upon a solid foundation. When the story came to his ears he would have taken pains to trace it to its source, and it would either have evaporated into legend or else have crystallized into historical fact under the process.

The balance of probability appears therefore to be decidedly in favour of the truth of the story. It only remains to consider how S. Luke could have become acquainted with it. Here we are necessarily reduced to conjecture. If there is no way in which it could have reached his ears except as a vague floating general tradition we might after all feel justified in rejecting it. But if we can see any reasonable possibility of his having received it from entirely trustworthy sources its credibility will be established as firmly as is admitted by the nature of the case.

Now we know that S. Luke visited Jerusalem about the year A.D. 60. He may have paid other visits at other times, but of them we know nothing. The only one of which we have any record is sufficient for our purpose. It may be presumed that he had by that time conceived the idea of writing his Gospel. If so he would therefore naturally have seized the opportunity to make such inquiries as were necessary at the fountain-head. His visit fell within the possible lifetime of Mary herself,[1] who alone knew the truth with regard to her Son's birth. It is intelligible that she should have kept her knowledge a secret for many years, but that when she had grown old, and had realized that our Lord's second coming was not imminent, she might have been willing to divulge it in the interests of posterity. There is therefore no insuperable obstacle to holding that S. Luke learned the story either from her own lips or from some member of her immediate circle to whom she had imparted it.

The Gospels constrain us to recognize that their Hero lived and died without the slightest consciousness of sin. Therefore His existence can only be described as a miracle of the most stupendous character. Compared with the belief that there ever was a really sinless man, it is a very small thing to be asked to believe that He was supernaturally born.

[1] Tradition asserts that Mary died in A.D. 64 at the age of 86. There is no reason known to us why this should not be true.

APPENDIX C

THE RESURRECTION

The Christian religion stands upon the belief that Christ rose again from the dead, and that He is alive to-day. No one who doubts that He is alive now has any right to claim the title of *Christian*; nor indeed is he likely to wish to do so. But of late years the traditional view as to what may be called the method of His Resurrection has been widely challenged: and by men within the Church, whose personal piety and devotion to Him are beyond question.

Briefly—the modern theory amounts to this. Before the Crucifixion His followers ought to have realized that the value of His life was something permanent. The lofty spiritual and moral ideals with which He alone of all men who have ever lived was entirely and absolutely identified throughout His life are in very truth of God. Therefore they are indestructible, and can suffer no loss by the physical death of their great Exponent.

Unfortunately, however, the Apostles had not grasped this. In their eyes His death was an overwhelming catastrophe of an irreparable character. It would speedily have weakened in their minds the impression which He had made, and all recollection of what he had said and done would have died with them. They would have had no Gospel to preach. Thus His influence would have been limited to a very small circle, and would have evaporated completely (as He had left no writings behind Him) in less than a century.

To prevent this God vouchsafed to them visions of Him of a peculiarly vivid kind. These visions began a day or two after His death, and recurred at intervals during a period of a few weeks. By that time the Apostles had learned their lesson, and the appearances ceased.[1]

After the Crucifixion the apostles underwent a real and unexpected experience of very great value. Otherwise the Church would not exist to-day.

But it is obvious that on the theory outlined above, this experience was something very different from the traditional belief of Christendom.

[1] It would be out of place to attempt to discuss the 'reality' of visions here. It is enough to say that these visions are as real as any can be.

It is equally obvious that the traditional belief is the more legitimate deduction from the pages of the Gospels. If the modern theory be true the Resurrection narratives are very misleading, and must be considered to have been brought into their present untrustworthy form by uncritical, unintelligent imagination.

Now, however much this view may have to commend it (and undoubtedly it has something) it is open to at least two serious objections.

1. Would such visions have produced the effect attributed to them? It is assumed that they would—and did. But can we be quite sure that the assumption is justified?

Certainty seems to be impossible, because there is no exactly parallel case anywhere. But personally I am inclined to think that those who make the assumption with confidence have not had much experience of human nature when it has been stirred to its depths by stern and tragic happenings. War teaches some lessons which are not to be found in books. It takes a great deal to reinspire men who have once become convinced that their cause has been irretrievably lost. It would, in fact, be hard to point to any other instance in which this has ever been done successfully. Would a series of fleeting visions, however vivid, have been enough? If visions can do so much, does not the Incarnation itself—be it said with all possible reverence—begin to appear superfluous?

2. We know that there was a very definite popular conception of what Messiah ought to be and do. We also know, because we possess the Gospels, that it entirely failed to remodel the record of the life of Jesus to suit its own requirements. There was no corresponding tradition as to the way in which Messiah would rise from the dead, because no one had imagined that He would ever die. It is therefore hard to see why popular misconception should have succeeded in transforming the events which immediately followed the Crucifixion out of all recognition (for it amounts to that) before the story was written down as we have it, when it has so signally failed to modify appreciably all that passed before.

The Resurrection narratives are admittedly neither very clear nor consistent. That is natural, and indicates that the original authors were trying to keep as close as possible to what they honestly believed to be the truth. If they agreed entirely in every detail we should at once, by all the laws of evidence, begin to suspect dishonest collusion. But on one point they

are unanimous—that the tomb was found empty. That we are bound to accept as a certain fact. And this raises the questions—How had it come to be empty? and, What does its emptiness signify?

The suggestion that the disciples went to the wrong place, and never discovered their mistake, may be dismissed as childish. The body was not where they had laid it some thirty-six hours before.

If it had been removed by an enemy it is hard to understand why the fact was not brought to light when the apostles began to attract the hostile notice of the Jewish authorities a few weeks later. The production of Jesus' corpse would have been a much more effective method of dealing with Christian preachers than either threats or punishment.

If it passed into the keeping of a friend he must have preserved his secret with most jealous care. Otherwise the Christian community could never have believed what it did in fact come to believe. And it is hardly conceivable that the story should never have leaked out in after years, and that the real, permanent, tomb of Jesus (where His mortal remains are still lying) should never have been known to more than one person.

Thus the practical point—What became of the Body?—is, though not in itself decisive, of real weight.

It is sometimes urged that the traditional Christian view is the outcome of the very concrete habit of mind characteristic of the Jews. The apostles, it is said, were incapable of conceiving a disembodied spirit at all. In their eyes a man was either alive or dead. If he were alive he must possess a body. Therefore, when they became convinced that the Spirit of Jesus was still alive—in which belief they were perfectly right—they jumped to the conclusion that it was still inhabiting the body which it had used upon earth—in which they were entirely wrong.

It is, however, always dangerous to assert a general negative. And to affirm that the apostles *could* not have regarded the soul as immortal apart from the body is to make a gratuitous assumption on very slender grounds.

The story of the Witch of Endor [1] implies that Samuel possessed a spirit which continued to live after the death of his body, for the scene is not laid at the site of his grave. *Ecclesiastes* could distinguish between the immortal spirit and the dust which had housed it.[2] And the author of *Wisdom* believed that phan-

[1] *1 Sam.* 28. [2] 117.

toms had appeared in Egypt.[1] Any Jew of the Dispersion, at least, must have known something of Persian, Egyptian, and Greek beliefs on the subject. The possibility of the existence of disembodied spirits of the dead cannot safely be assumed to have been beyond the mental horizon of even the more conservative inhabitants of Palestine.

It is ludicrous to assert that it was outside the cognizance of S. Paul: and the weight of his testimony (which is earlier than that of the Gospels as we have them) seems sometimes to be overlooked.

S. Paul had a very definite doctrine of a future state which he developes at some length in *1 Cor.* 15^{35-54}. He also refers to it in *2 Cor.* 5^{1-4}. It is bound up with what he describes as *a spiritual body*: but the exact nature of this body is by no means clear.

It was not—indeed it could not be—perfectly clear to S. Paul himself, and he has to seek for such analogies in the world of nature as he can find. The most helpful is the comparison with the seed which in dying gives birth to a nobler growth.

It is difficult to read *1 Cor.* 15 without feeling that S. Paul would have been more at ease if he had contented himself with a simpler doctrine of the immortality of the soul—and no more. It is impossible to hold that he could not have written in such a strain if he had wished. But as he did not choose to do so, he must have had some strong reason for preferring the less familiar and more difficult alternative. Was it because he felt that belief in what he calls *a spiritual body* was the least inadequate explanation he could give of what he knew he had seen?

Jesus had appeared to him on the road to Damascus: and it may be on later occasions besides. And S. Paul knew that He was not a disembodied spirit. What more He was, might be impossible to put clearly into words. But that He was more S. Paul had no doubt; and what He is, is what we all may hope to become.

The traditional view of the Resurrection is admittedly beset with difficulties. But we cannot discard it without handling our documents in a very arbitrary way. And if we do discard it in favour of something which seems simpler we create for ourselves two fresh problems.

1. In what sense can Jesus be said to have triumphed over death?

[1] 17^{4}.

It had not annihilated him: but neither, we believe, has it ever annihilated anybody else. If he merely survived the death of His body in exactly the same way that millions of others have survived it, both before and since, we cannot say that the power of death has been in any sense broken. Death still reigns as it had done before. Its ultimate destruction for which S. Paul looked [1] has not yet been brought within the range of conceivable possibility. In that case is there any escape from the conclusion that there is one thing outside the sovereignty of God, and beyond the range of His power?

Yet if we draw that conclusion we have surrendered to Oriental Dualism: that is, to the idea that there are two equal, self-existent, eternal, irreconcilably hostile powers, represented by Light and Darkness. The view of the universe which this involves is obviously much simpler and more readily intelligible than our own. But Christianity regards it as fundamentally false.

2. If our Lord's human body saw corruption, as it must have done if He did not raise it from the grave, what is our view as to the ultimate destiny of matter?

We believe that matter, no less than spirit, is the creation of God: and that therefore it lies within the scope of redemption. Here again we differ entirely from the Oriental philosophy, older than Christianity, which holds that matter is inherently, eternally, irredeemably evil.[2]

But if matter be capable of redemption our hope for it must lie in its association with spirit. No matter has ever been permeated and dominated by spirit so completely as was the human body of Jesus. Therefore we might naturally expect that body not to be entirely subject to the laws which appear at present to rule us. If the spirit of Jesus could not attain a complete and unique mastery over His body, sufficient to exempt it from the ordinary law of corruption which otherwise must be counted universal, we seem to have no right to hope that any redemption of matter can ever be possible.

In this case when S. Paul spoke of *the redemption of our body* [3] he was either using a phrase which has no real meaning at all, or else he was thinking merely of victory over sin in this life. But the context of the passage makes it difficult to believe that he meant no more than this.

[1] *1 Cor.* 15^{26}.

[2] Where this philosophy comes into contact with Christianity, which is principally at Alexandria in the second century of our era, it is known as *Gnosticism*. It appears to be the foundation of Brahminism and Buddhism to-day.

[3] *Rom.* 8^{23}.

Our view of the true nature and significance of the Resurrection, as of everything else which forms part of the Christian religion (which amounts to saying 'of everything else in the world'), will be found to depend upon the answer which we return to the question—Who was Jesus?

If He were merely one of the greatest, or even the greatest, of all the sons of men, then traditional Christianity is in error on this as on most other points. But if He were in truth the Incarnate Son of God, all questions which arise in connexion with Him assume a new aspect, and are unlikely to admit of simple, conventional answers.

If the Son of God became man, His purpose, to state it in the broadest and most general terms, was to restore harmony to a disordered world. The relation between man and God has been dislocated by man's sin, and every other relation of every kind which can exist has been more or less dislocated in consequence. Our world is, in fact, a mass of discords. But we are quite sure that that is not what God meant it to be.

The purpose of the Incarnation was to resolve these discords, and to restore the broken harmony of the universe. There is no other purpose within our comprehension which can be assigned to it. And unless its purpose can be brought within the range of our comprehension the Incarnation, be it said with all reverence, becomes futile. It can accomplish nothing in or for us if we are incapable of understanding anything of what it aims at accomplishing.

The deepest and most conspicuous of all discords is the immemorial antithesis between Spirit and Matter. Of this every one is conscious in his own life. In us the two are conjoined. Up to a point they are allies, for Matter is the only vehicle through which Spirit can normally express itself. But beyond that point they are fiercely at war.

Are we to regard this discord as eternal? Or is it conceivable that even this, the deepest, most ancient, and most fundamental of all discords, might ultimately be resolved, so that Spirit and Matter became one perfectly harmonious whole?

The prospect is so glorious that the hope of it is worth cherishing even if we were constrained to admit that it had no warrant outside our own imagination. But if there can be any warrant for our hope, where can we look for it save in the unique life of Jesus? That life enlarges our ideas of what may be called spiritual possibility as nothing else has ever done.

If complete harmony between Spirit and Matter be ever

possible, we are right to look for an earnest of it in Him; and it must be manifested most fully after His death, to rid us of the fear lest after all the victory does lie with death. If the dominion of death over matter be necessarily, always, final and complete, then the deepest of all discords is one which nothing can resolve. But if we accept the Resurrection narratives of the Gospels as true history, then perfect harmony between Spirit and Matter has in one instance been restored. His material body is still a material body: but it is completely under the dominion of Spirit as it had not been before. And in the Risen Lord we see an earnest of our own ultimate future.

The traditional Christian view of the Resurrection is admittedly very difficult to hold. But if we discard it we seem to be plunged at once into new difficulties even more formidable than those from which we are trying to escape.

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